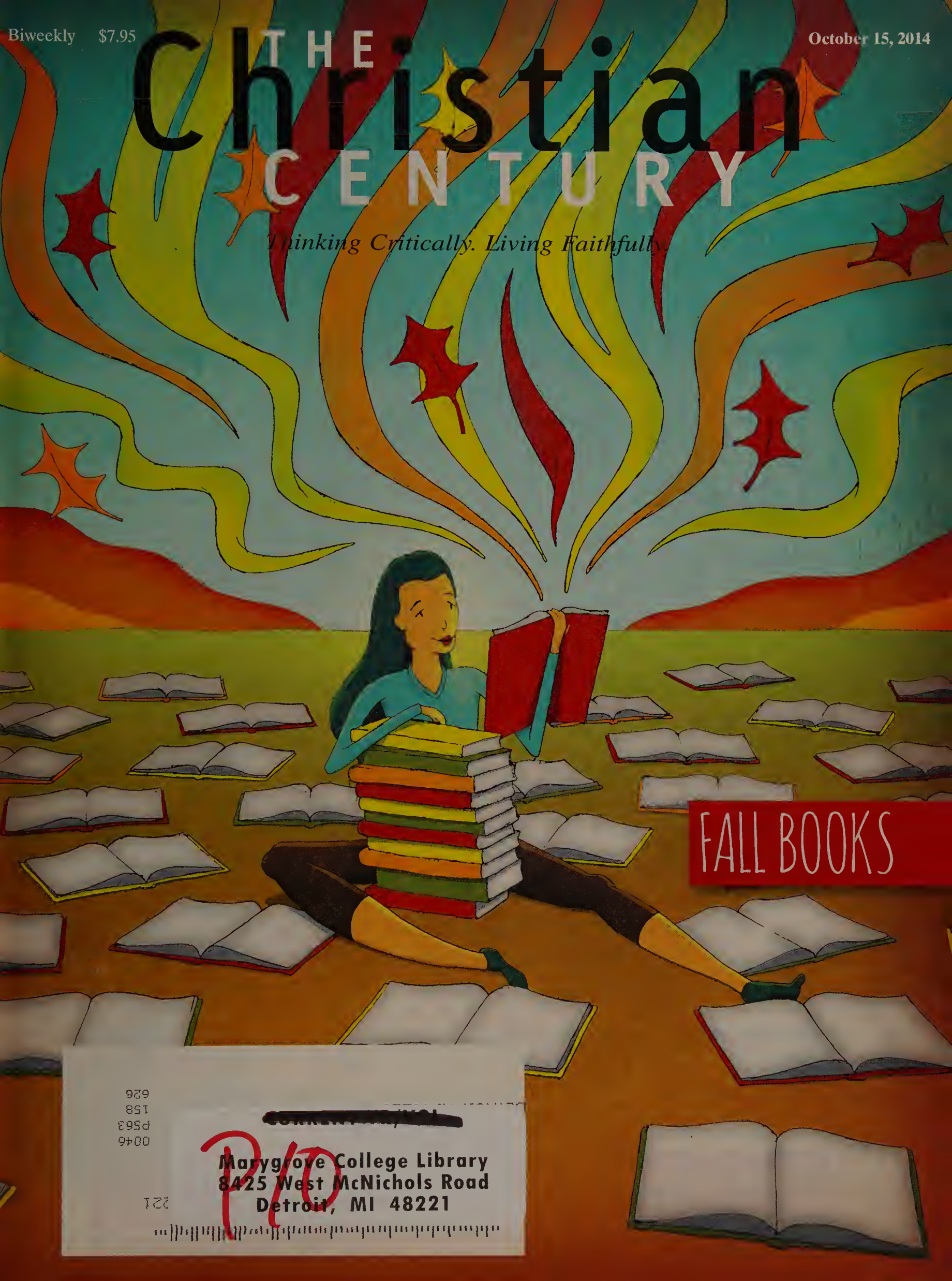


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Shelf space

I ONCE HAD the privilege of presiding at the wedding of a seminary president and a professor of homiletics. I said in the homily that I wasn't concerned about the longtime viability of their relationship, but I was worried about how they would manage to combine their personal libraries.

I'd like to claim that idea as my own, but it was inspired by Anne Fadiman's essay "Marrying Libraries," in her book *Ex Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader*.

Fadiman wrote that it was good that the Book of Common Prayer didn't say anything in the marriage vows about marrying libraries and throwing out duplicates. "That would have been a far more solemn vow, one that probably would have caused the wedding to grind to a mortifying halt."

I reread that essay recently when my wife and I moved, and it became apparent that the time had come to weed out books from my library. I knew that day would come, but I dreaded it. I love books. I love owning them. I like to hold them in my hands. When I visit other people's homes, I cannot keep my eyes off the books they are reading. I like to see what my seat-mate on the plane or the woman sitting across from me on the bus is reading. I keep books for work in one place and books read for pleasure in another. I have a special place for big books of art, photography, and travel and always several books on my bedside table.

Now it was time to decide which books I could live without. I looked at each title on a shelf, sometimes opening it to see what I had underlined or written in the margins. Inevitably I decided I couldn't part with it. An hour of scanning books usually resulted in a paltry two or three volumes to be given away. I kept at it, becoming more ruthless with each pass. Finally I had a number of boxes ready to be taken away. But I still had most of my books.

The ones I kept included Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*, the reading and rereading of which taught me that faith is far more than intellectual assent. I've kept half a shelf for works by Kathleen Norris and Barbara Brown Taylor. Frederick Buechner, Harvey Cox, and William Placher easily made the cut. Martin Marty's entire shelf remains, and it felt downright insensitive and irresponsible to consider letting go of Joseph Sittler's few small volumes. I kept Gustav Aulén, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich—even though I never made it past page 50 of Tillich's *Systematic Theology*.

I may have at it again sometime—but I doubt it. I have committed myself at least to keeping a state of equilibrium: every new book must occasion an old book's departure. What will be done with all the books that remain? It's a problem that I really don't mind leaving to my children and grandchildren to resolve.

MINISTRY

I N T H E 21ST CENTURY

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Community and police

The militarization of police does increase intimidation and violence by public servants and thus erodes the positive bonds essential for a just society (“Militarized policing,” by Tobias Winright, Sept. 17). Yet Winright overlooks how our society’s failure to regulate firearms pushes both police and civilians to support police militarization. As long as guns remain universally available, law enforcement will favor militarization out of self-protection rather than risk the practice of community policing.

We have given the police reason to regard members of the public as well-armed assassins. We should not be surprised when sometimes they behave like an army of occupation.

*Charles Hoffacker
Brandywine, Md.*

I have been appalled at the all too frequent “shoot first, talk later” approach to policing that is practiced by some. There must be dialogue about what ethical policing entails. There must be dialogue about the need for community policing in which the police know the community they are assigned to protect. It’s easy to shoot a stereotype deemed soulless and not human. But if that’s Joe’s son in the street, how different the outcomes may be. What if the first weapon drawn was the effective use of one’s mouth to calm a situation?

*Kwasi Kena
christiancentury.org comment*

Resisting revenge . . .

A great deal of Bethany Sollereder’s interpretation of Andrew Elphinstone’s *Freedom, Suffering and Love* resonates with me (“From survival to love,” Sept. 17), but I want to point out that choosing to forgive is not about offering transformation to the perpetra-

tor. “Let[ting] a person know they are truly forgiven” and expecting a lifetime of “gratitude” in return is naive and possibly self-abusive.

But choosing to walk through the pain without inflicting harm and relying on God’s grace for healing and transformation offer a multitude of gifts for the one who was hurt. In other words, there is payoff for the victim to choose goodness and grace over evil and revenge. It doesn’t just hinge on the one who did the hurting, and suggesting that it does may perpetuate victimhood.

*Lyn Reith Barrett
Woodbury, Conn.*

Learning empathy . . .

I was stunned by M. Craig Barnes’s claim, which he supports by reference to the work of Edwin Friedman, that pastors and counselors should not seek to have empathy with people in distress, because none of us can understand another person’s feelings (“I don’t feel your pain,” July 23). His claim is at variance with my 40 years’ experience teaching empathic listening using the client-centered therapy (CCT) developed by Carl Rogers and with literally hundreds of empirical studies verifying the efficacy of CCT.

From Barnes’s comments and Friedman’s book I would guess that neither have firsthand experience with empathic listening as developed by CCT. I’ve been to many conferences over the years at which comments have been made about CCT that are grossly inaccurate. Most are caricatures. Friedman refers only to his own experience, not to any empirical evidence or other testimony to support his opinions.

It’s true that saying “I know how you feel” or “I understand” virtually never conveys to the one in distress that you do understand. It only leaves them feel-

ing lonely. But practitioners of CCT know that it is possible to understand another’s experience as it is being expressed. To do this one has to learn to put to one side one’s own reactions to the other, because the reactions stop one from listening. Listening comes from a different internal space. It takes discipline but is absolutely possible—though unfamiliar to most.

Recently in class a student said, “Once I let go of any agenda of trying to help and instead just accompanied the other, it was easy for me to understand.” What isn’t generally known about CCT listening is that it takes focus, concentration, and discipline. “Don’t just do something, stand there” is entirely counter to our conventional and common notion of helping.

The process involves checking out one’s understanding of the other person’s feelings by saying what one has understood and asking if it is correct, and then being willing to be corrected. It takes courage to accompany a person in deep pain this way and to try to voice the very deep and raw feelings the other is experiencing. However, it is only this voicing which tells the person that you do understand.

Is it not more helpful, Barnes asks, simply to hold a widow’s hand, listen silently, and pray? Certainly that is powerful. People are rarely listened to even silently. But it is even more powerful for one to attend to the other’s experience and to say the meaning that one is getting from the other—to test one’s understanding. One can meet the other who is weeping with sorrow by saying, “You are so sad you can cry and cry and cry.” That is being truly present with them—to understand their pain and in doing so also convey that you are not afraid of the raw and deep feelings they are experiencing.

*Allan Rohlfs
Chicago, Ill.*

October 15, 2014

Resisting ISIS

The so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria barbarically beheaded Western civilians and put out videos of the murders for the world to see—inviting, it seemed, the United States and Western countries to intervene militarily. It has killed countless Christians, Yazidis, and Shi'a Muslims, whom it considers infidels, and it has imposed a brutal form of shari'a law in the territory it controls. It rules by terror, engaging in public floggings and executions and amputating the hands of thieves.

There is no doubt that the rise of ISIS is frightening. But as *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman notes, fear is not a good guide to policy. Fear makes people exaggerate risks and often act in ways that make the situation worse.

The key policy question is not how frightening and troubling ISIS is, but what actual threat it poses to the United States and to the stability of the Middle East. And the next question is: What can the United States best do to contain that threat without causing more harm? On this issue, President Obama has rightly said—even as he prepared to authorize air strikes—that “there’s no American military solution” to the crisis ISIS presents.

That’s because ISIS is the latest of a series of radical Islamic groups that have vied for the soul of the Islamic and Arabic world. Hisham Melhem, correspondent for a leading Lebanese daily newspaper, traces this struggle back to the defeat of the Arab nationalist cause in the 1967 war against Israel. This defeat led to the demise of Arab nationalism, creating a vacuum, which Islamists of various forms have tried to fill. American intervention will not resolve the longer-term issues of Muslim identity and its political expression. It was, after all, American intervention in Iraq that created the political conditions in which ISIS was able to grow.

ISIS has atavistic aims, wanting to return Islam to some supposed golden era of the past. Its rise is most of all a threat to other countries in the region, including Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. Those regional powers have the means and the motivation to contain ISIS.

President Obama was under extreme political pressure to strike at ISIS. But his skepticism about military force remains sound. The most fruitful role for the United States is to press Iraq to grant more power to Sunni Muslims, so as to undercut the appeal of ISIS, and then to press other Arab and Muslim countries to be part of a regional response.

American intervention will not resolve the longer-term issues of Muslim identity and its political expression.

CENTURY marks

HEALING SERVICE: In a service of reconciliation, about 1,000 people gathered in the St. Giles Church in Edinburgh on the Sunday following the vote on Scottish independence, which brought out 85 percent of voters. Representative leaders of both camps were present for a show of unity following the divisive vote for independence, which was defeated by about ten points. In a sermon, John Chalmers, moderator of the Church of Scotland, acknowledged there is more national healing that must be done. "Today and in the weeks to come Scotland needs magnanimity all round, and it needs a process for shaping our future [that] allows every voice (the 45 percent as well as the 55 percent) not just to be heard but to be listened to," he said (*Guardian*, September 21).

URBAN MEGACHURCH: The influential Australian-based megachurch Hillsong made it to the front page of the *New York Times* on September 9. Hillsong, founded 30 years ago, has churches in many major cities around the world, including New York and Los Angeles. Young people are especially drawn to the church, known for its original folk-rock music which incorporates catchy tunes and accessible lyrics. By some estimates, Hillsong has 100,000 people in its pews at their various locations each Sunday, including multiple campuses in Australia. The Pentecostal-leaning church has drawn fire from both the right and the left—the right for what is deemed a thin theology, the left for its strong stand against abortion and the inclusion of gays.

BUBBLE BURST: Physicist Stephen Hawking made a \$100 bet that physicists wouldn't be able to discover the Higgs boson, the so-called "God particle." He lost the bet when the Higgs boson was discovered two years ago, and he said that the discovery had made physics less interesting. He and other scientists are also theorizing that the Higgs boson could one day destroy the universe by creating a vacuum bubble that expands through space, wiping out everything. That is unlikely to happen anytime soon. If and when it does, humans won't have any warning, and it will come at the speed of light (*Christian Science Monitor*, September 10).

NOTABLE SILENCE: The chief rabbi in France says the country is indifferent to the rise of anti-Semitism. Haim Korsia, elected to his post in June, recalls how large crowds demonstrated in support of the Jewish community in Paris in 1990 after a Jewish cemetery was decimated in a southeastern town of France. Nothing like that has happened in response to recent acts of anti-Semitism, including the firebombing of a kosher grocery store. In contrast, thousands rallied recently in Germany to protest an uptick of anti-Semitism there. More than 3,000 Jews left France for Israel last year, and it is estimated that another 5,000 will leave this year (Reuters).

TERROR TWEETS: ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) is one of the most media savvy militant groups in the Middle East. Its social media director is thought to be an American, Ahmad Abousamra, who was born in France, raised in the Boston area, and has dual U.S. and Syrian citizenship. He studied computer science at Northeastern University, where he was on the dean's



list. Abousamra encourages ISIS militants to use Facebook and Twitter to publicize their exploits, including posting photos of severed heads and executions of prisoners (*The Week*, September 19).

COVER UP: A British team surveyed 600 Muslim women living in Britain to see how they felt about their own bodies. The women who wear the hijab (head covering) at least part of the time had on average more positive body images than those who never wear one. The hijab wearers were less inclined to want to be thin, and they were less influenced by media standards of female beauty. The lead researcher cautioned against applying their findings to Muslim women who live in countries where the wearing of the hijab is mandatory. The study did not prove that the hijab was the source of a better body image (NPR, September 15).

GOD AT THE MALL: When a mall in Fort Myers, Florida, hit hard times during the Great Recession, it was repurposed into All Faiths Church Mall. Almost three dozen different places of worship were installed in the mall, representing 52 different denominations and religions, including Sikhs, Muslims, Jews, Baha'i, Buddhists, and Mormons. The Jewish temple is located in space once occupied by a J. Crew clothing store. "You'd be surprised at how easy it is to turn a J. Crew into a fully functioning synagogue," says mall manager David Aubrey. The mall fountain has been used as a baptistery. A food court, dubbed the Fellowship Food Court, is a place for people to grab something to eat and mingle across religious lines. But not all has gone smoothly. Hindus did not like using space where once there was a leather shop. An evangelical worship service held next to a Buddhist temple was deemed too noisy for Buddhist meditation (CBC Radio).

CURTAIN CALL: A funeral home in Saginaw, Michigan, is providing a convenient way for people to show their last respects to the deceased: a drive-through lane for viewing the body. The drive-through option is available only when viewing isn't happening inside. A

curtain conceals the deceased until a car drives up to the window. The curtain remains open for three minutes while music is played. Drive-through mourners can sign a guest book and place memorial gifts into a slot. There are at least three other funeral homes in the country providing a similar option. One funeral home in Chicago recently closed its drive-through option after more than 20 years because of vandalism (*Saginaw News*, September 15).

REVEALING NEWS: The demise of American newspapers is well known, but Anya Schiffrin contends that internationally investigative journalism lives on. The amount of data online and the ability of journalists to communicate with each other through the Internet are aiding new forms of reporting across international borders. Schiffrin sites numerous exposés of worker injustice that implicate Western corporations: migrant workers from Nepal making iPhones in Malaysia

were laid off and forced to fend for themselves when Apple rejected inferior products, and Indonesians were forced into slave-like working conditions on Korean fishing boats off the coast of New Zealand that were supplying American chains such as Safeway, Walmart, and Whole Foods (*Utne*, August 27).

HOSPICE CHURCH: Citrus County, north of Tampa, Florida, is part of what is called the "gray belt," an area of eight counties with one of the oldest populations in the country. This area foreshadows the future of the country as a whole. In 15 years, one in four residents in Citrus County will be 65 or older. In the not-too-distant future, one in five Americans will be over 65. The First Presbyterian Church in the area is sometimes referred to as a hospice church. The church has a difficult time making the changes that would attract younger families, yet the older members are dying off or moving north to be near family (AP).

TEACHING VALUES

SOURCE: PEW RESEARCH



“When you come to church, when you worship Him, you’re not doing it for God really. You’re doing it for yourself, because that’s what makes God happy.”

— Victoria Osteen, copastor of Lakewood Church, quoted in a sermon criticized by many Christians for promoting a “me-centered” Christianity (RNS)

“Can you love your neighbor as yourself and at the same time knee him in the face as hard as you can?”

— Pastor Paul Burrell of Rochester, New York, who has incorporated mixed martial arts, a violent sport, into his ministry. He answers his own question in the affirmative (*New York Times*, September 8)

One store, many churches

WITH HIS WIFE, Beth, Byron Borger co-owns *Hearts and Minds*, an independent Christian bookstore in Dallastown, Pennsylvania, and writes a blog for the store's website. The store seeks to foster "a uniquely Christian worldview where Christ's Lordship is honored and lived out in relevant ways in the midst of our highly secularized, post-modern culture."

Why did you and your wife start a religious bookstore?

In the late 1970s Beth and I worked for a campus ministry organization called the Coalition for Christian Outreach, which was based in a Presbyterian church near Pittsburgh. That congregation and the CCO both emphasized a wide-as-life vision of redemption, relating faith to all areas of life. This meant we read a lot of books

with students across the curriculum, relating theology to technology, medicine, business, whatever. We realized that the students who told us that we ought to have a bookstore were right. We loved books and loved suggesting resources. With a naive love of books and belief in their power, we opened our shop in 1982.

You live in the same building where your store is. How does that work out?

"We have to make and remake the case that reading is a spiritual practice."

We chose that arrangement so we could be equally involved in the business and more easily present to our children

when they were young. It hasn't been easy, but it has been wonderful having such easy access to the store day or night.

What's most satisfying about running an independent religious bookstore? What is most challenging?

We continue to enjoy the interaction with customers and introducing people to new—and often old as well—authors. It is an honor to help pastors and church leaders think through reading programs

for their own development and for their parishes. We love helping book clubs, church libraries, Bible study groups, Sunday school classes. We are aware every day how this calling demands of us a huge ecumenicity, a willingness to serve a variety of folks, and the tenacity to continue to promote books.

The business challenges are almost insurmountable, with fewer readers—and people wanting books as cheap as possible, as if the bottom line is all that matters. If I see another post about sustainability and Wendell Berry with a link to buy books on localism from Amazon, I'll pull my hair out.

What does a bookstore do now that it might not have done ten or 15 years ago?

Most obvious has been the shift to online bookselling, writing a blog, doing the social media stuff, spreading the word (and getting orders) via Twitter and Facebook. Our mail-order work accounts for about a third of our business, and we find that the Internet has al-

Drought

The laurel sweeps its lower limbs
all the way down the rock
and into the creek that wasn't there
till last week's rainstorm.

If leaves could speak —
and they do, in their everlasting fragrance —
they would welcome the sound of water
traveling over sandstone.

The leaves would say,
We missed you—for almost a year,
you were gone. Please stay this time.
And the water would say, *Maybe. See ya.*

Paul Willis

lowed us to publish book reviews, engage customers, and create a great tribe of fans and friends. The amount of information, though, online and elsewhere, is nearly overwhelming. In this sense, it is harder to catch the attention of potential readers. We have to make and remake the case that reading is a fundamental spiritual practice and that books are tools that can serve our Christian discipleship.

How would you describe your customers?

We stock books from all the mainline denominational publishers, but we probably have more customers who identify with evangelicalism than not. That younger evangelical pastors and certainly evangelical laypeople read more than older mainline ones seems pretty evident.

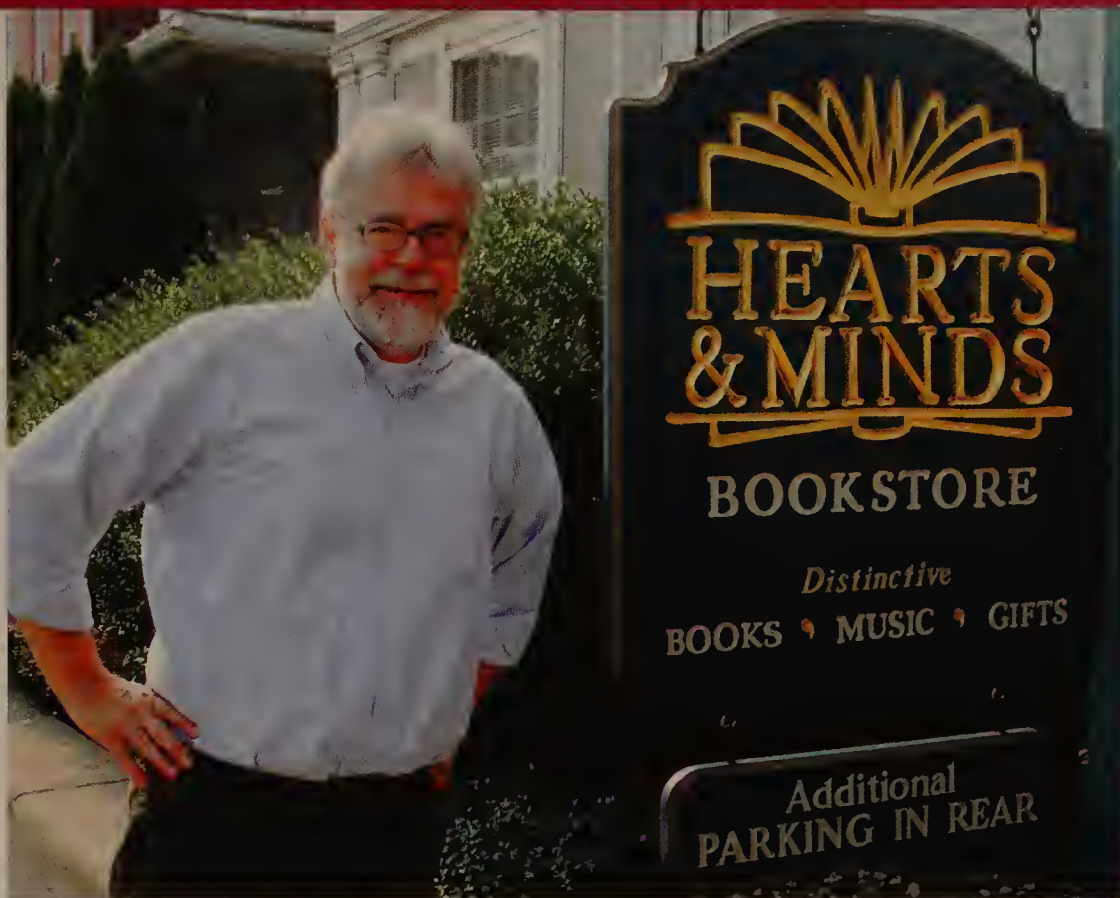
We are honored to have fairly complex conversations with folks wanting to dig deep into thoughtful Christian literature but who haven't read much theology or other religious scholarship at all. Our customers are often people reading James K. A. Smith, say, or attending the Q conferences or who are fans of Timothy Keller.

What keeps people coming back?

I suspect they like the attention we try to offer, not only to the details of our orders but to the conversations we have on books and authors. Much of it comes down to relationships. People hunger for community. Finding booksellers who want to be an influence, who want to be a friend, creates a bit of a tribe.

Do people walk in the door thinking you represent one kind of Christian and maybe walk out when they don't see their own views or politics represented?

The bigotry on both sides is demoralizing. My sense is that it is worse on the left, with progressives refusing to read even thoughtful evangelicals. I suppose some highbrow liturgical types don't like our simple Amish novels, and I suppose some evangelicals are perplexed by our Catholic stuff. But it isn't as bad as it used to be, and we see signs of greater willingness to read outside of one's own favored tradition. The younger mainline clergy are sometimes themselves rather evangelical, or robust moderates with



pretty orthodox views, not like, say, the Bishop Spong or Jesus Seminar views that characterize many older liberals. And of course many younger Christians are evangelical on core doctrines and progressive on most social issues.

Is it the rare sort of place where evangelicals and liberals actually meet each other and interact as Christians?

I know that a few folks of differing perspectives have become friends because they've met in our shop. I know that some people have agreed to read "across party lines" because of our recommendations, which they've come to trust.

So what books would you recommend?

I think my favorite book these days is Steven Garber's *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good*, beautifully published by InterVarsity Press. Our bookstore is mentioned in his eloquent first book, *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior*.

I'm a big fan of the books on spirituality by Ruth Haley Barton of the Transforming Center. She has a new one on communal spiritual practices.

I cannot recommend enough the feisty books by Brian Walsh, a campus minister at the University of Toronto who runs a morning Eucharist called Wine Before Breakfast. *Colossians Remixed: Subverting*

the Empire (cowritten with his wife, New Testament scholar Sylvia Keesmaat) is one of the most stimulating books I've ever read. I love the contemplative writer Robert Benson, a lay Benedictine who writes about spiritual formation, but also has books about caring for his backyard, baseball, Eucharist, finding one's vocation.

I love the upbeat and often very funny lines of Margot Starbuck; she has written five books, and I can't wait for another. Zondervan's best-selling author Ann Voskamp has a new devotional using the Jesse Tree.

Have you heard of the forthcoming *The Book of Strange New Things*, by Michel Faber? Amazingly, it is about a missionary effort on other planets, and the faith crisis of the missionary's beloved spouse who is left on Earth, which is slowly becoming unraveled. I don't know if the author sees himself as a person of faith, but it is highly anticipated as an important literary novel.

My all-time favorite writer that few have heard of is Calvin Seerveld, a Dutch Calvinist professor of aesthetics who studied with Barth. He has translated Psalms and writes hymns alongside his stunning work in the arts. A six-volume set of his occasional academic papers, essays, and sermons was recently released by Dordt College Press. **CC**

—Richard A. Kauffman

BEST SELLERS

Abingdon

The CEB Study Bible

Calvin vs. Wesley: Bringing Belief in Line with Practice

by Don Thorsen

Consider the Birds: A Provocative Guide to Birds of the Bible

by Debbie Blue

Revival: Faith as Wesley Lived It

by Adam Hamilton

Slowing Time: Seeing the Sacred Outside Your Kitchen Door

by Barbara Mahany

Cascade

Oriented to Faith: Transforming the Conflict over Gay Relationships

by Tim Otto

Touchdowns for Jesus and Other Signs of Apocalypse: Lifting the Veil on Big-Time Sports

by Marcia W. Mount Shoop

Killing from the Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War

by Robert Emmet Meagher

Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength

by Chanequa Walker-Barnes

The Death of the Messiah and the Birth of the New Covenant: A (Not So) New Model of the Atonement

by Michael J. Gorman

Cambridge University Press

God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'

by Sarah Coakley

Psalms (New Cambridge Bible Commentary)

by Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger Jr.

David, King of Israel, and Caleb in Biblical Memory

by Jacob L. Wright

An Introduction to the Medieval Bible

by Frans van Liere

God's Presence: A Contemporary Recapitulation of Early Christianity

by Frances Young

Eerdmans

How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor

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by Mark Allen Powell (Baker Academic)

Religious leaders announce vote campaign

Faith leaders who sit to the left in U.S. politics say they won't let the religious right claim the moral mantle in the elections of 2014.

In September they announced a campaign to boost voter registration and encourage voters, particularly in poor and immigrant communities, to go to the polls.

Ted Strickland of the Center for American Progress Action Fund, a Methodist minister and former governor of Ohio, said he and others will go door to door and church to church to press their message: that people of faith should pursue fair and just public policy.

William Barber, pastor of Greenleaf Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Goldsboro, North Carolina, and leader of the Moral Monday movement, which has protested actions by the state's conservative legislature, quoted Isaiah 10: "Woe to those who make unjust laws."

The coalition plans to use social media and traditional methods of voter mobilization.

The PICO National Network has launched Let My People VOTE, an initiative aiming to register nearly 50,000 new voters in counties with rapidly growing Latino populations and large racial gaps in voter registration.

It also hopes to collect 187,000 signatures to place on the ballot measures on minimum wage, paid sick days, early voting, sentencing reform, and voter re-enfranchisement.

Also part of the effort is Faith in Public Life.

"The Christian right often had voter mobilization and contact tools and text campaigns that were well financed," said Jennifer Butler, CEO of Faith in Public

Life and coleader of Iona Conversations in Washington, D.C., connected to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). "This is one of the first times that progressive religious leaders, or leaders that are working toward more social justice, have had these kinds of massive voter contact strategies and capabilities, and I think that changes the landscape for the future."

Another coalition member is a group of Catholic sisters taking a month-long Nuns on the Bus tour to promote voter registration and campaign against the influence of outside money on politics.

The spigot for undisclosed donations,

which can be made by unions as well as corporations, was opened by the 2010 *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision. That was followed by another 5-4 ruling in April, *McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission*.

The Nuns on the Bus tour, the third led by Sister Simone Campbell, who heads Network, a Catholic social justice lobby, includes canvassing low-income neighborhoods to rally voters to cast ballots November 4.

"We want to say the 100 percent are welcome to the table," Campbell said. "But leave your moneybags outside the door." —Lauren Markoe and David Gibson, Religion News Service



LET MY PEOPLE VOTE: William Barber, pastor and North Carolina activist (far right), speaking at a Moral Monday rally, is part of the coalition seeking to increase voter registration efforts.

PHOTO BY TWBUCKNER (CREATIVE COMMONS)

UCC investment fund will be free of fossil fuels

The United Church of Christ's investment arm is launching a fund this fall that is free of fossil fuel extraction and production companies—possibly the first such fund based in a Christian denomination.

Since United Church Funds announced the Beyond Fossil Fuels fund, the UCC board as well as UCC congregations, conferences, agencies, and other affiliated groups have committed nearly \$16 million in investments as of late September.

"Any church that would like to have their investment be free of fossil fuels can invest part or all of their funds in this fund," said Donald Hart, president of UCF, which manages investments for the endowments of local churches and the institutional assets of hospitals and administrative bodies of the UCC.

As far as UCF officials know, it's the first launch of a denominationally based fossil fuel-free fund. People outside of the UCC have inquired about the fund.

"We are going to begin marketing to other faith-based organizations," Hart said.

The domestic core equity fund—with U.S. stock from big-name companies—will be managed by Quantitative Management Associates. The fund's starting goal of \$20 million is based on that manager's minimum, Hart said. The fund continues UCF's current policy of screening funds that deal in tobacco, gambling, alcohol, and conventional and nuclear weapons.

The UCC General Synod called for creation of the fund in a 2013 resolution, "Urging Divestment—Along with Other Strategies—from Fossil Fuel Companies."

The new fund comes alongside existing investment funds that already engage in shareholder activism, said Kathryn McCloskey, UCF director of social responsibility.

"It strengthens the options for UCC

congregations," she said. The work of the new fund could expand into other asset funds, "if we find that there's overwhelming interest, investors, and, most importantly, dollars flowing into the Beyond Fossil Fuels fund."

UCC leaders acknowledged that creating the fund is only one step.

"Our divestment will not stop the drilling of oil, and will not stop the use of fossil fuels, but what it will do is [challenge] the notion that this continued behavior is appropriate," said Geoffrey Black, UCC general minister and president. "Hopefully that will feed into a broader movement for change, which is really what we're after."

Black noted that the denomination's pension funds have a different approach to the goals in the resolution.

Rick Walters, director of corporate social responsibility for Pension Boards—United

Church of Christ, Inc., explained that while Pension Boards is among the UCF's investors, its funds are separate and held in accounts owned by individual employees. They are also subject to separate regulation.

"We have less flexibility in how we can invest than United Church Funds," he said. "We applaud what they're doing. Our only caveat is that we remain independent with respect to the responsibility that we have to the members of the retirement fund."

Pension Boards currently has no plans to work on alternative investments, Walters said.

"It might be possible if the opportunities that are presented by the fund would be competitive with the assets that we're letting go of," he said. "In other words, if we could find assets that were greater than or equal to the ones we're selling off."

Pension Boards uses shareholder advocacy to work on climate change issues with all of its holdings—for example, with real estate on retrofitting buildings for more efficient energy use. In that work Pension Boards and UCF join ecumenical partners such as the United Methodist General Board of Pension and Health Benefits.



Donald Hart



Kathryn McCloskey

The UM board is also launching a new fund, planned for January, with stricter environmental screens. The Equities Social Values Plus Fund, for UM entities only, draws from third-party research that rates companies on human rights and environmental criteria.

The new fund will be an option for UM clergy in the portion of their pension fund that "they can self-direct," said Anita Green, sustainable investment strategies manager for Wespath, which manages the UM General Board's investments.

Such actions are needed, in addition to efforts like making church buildings more energy efficient, said Emily Goldthwaite Fries, associate minister of Mayflower Community Congregational UCC in Minneapolis.

For decades many people "have thought, 'if I just recycle more, if I drive less, if I drive the right vehicle, then climate change will go away,' and that hasn't happened," she said.

"We need to be organized so that we can make an impact on a more systemic level, which in this case is the fossil fuel industry."

Mayflower Church has a foundation for social justice grants that will invest with the Beyond Fossil Fuels fund.

"For us, fossil fuel divestment is very hopeful," Goldthwaite Fries said. "The church has a very powerful message to preach, that business as usual isn't just the way it is. The gospel really gives us the courage to preach hope in the face of cynicism."

While many opponents of divestment prefer the tool of shareholder activism, companies "don't have a financial incentive not to drill for more oil," she said. "Fossil fuel companies have not been taking action on the knowledge that we actually have to leave it in the ground."

Minnesota communities like hers are also concerned about oil that's being transported from North Dakota by train and pipeline through "some very fragile habitats and ecosystems," she said.

In such situations, "we need to be the moral voice that faith communities can provide," she said. "Businesses can make ethical decisions, and we can support that with our money." —Celeste Kennel-Shank, CHRISTIAN CENTURY

More drums, fewer choirs in worship, national study of congregations shows

U.S. religious congregations are marching to their own drums now more than ever.

More congregations have drums in worship—along with hand waving, amen shouting, and dancing in the aisles—according to one of the findings of the latest National Congregations Study.

The study, released in September, draws on interviews with leaders at 1,331 churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples and updates data from 1998 and 2006 studies. Non-Christian congregations were included in the study but are too few for statistical analysis by topics. The margin of error was plus or minus 3 percentage points for most findings.

In 2012, 11 percent of congregations had an all-white membership, down from 20 percent in 1998. Behind the change are factors such as upward mobility among African Americans, increasing rates of interracial marriage, and immigration, said Mark Chaves, the Duke University sociology professor who directed the study.

“On the ground, this means there are more white congregations with a smattering of minorities,” he said. “However, the percent of mainly black churches with some white people is not increasing.”

In an upcoming issue of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Chaves wrote that 86 percent of U.S. congregations “remain overwhelmingly” made up of one racial or ethnic group.

The NCS also finds that nearly one in four congregations—or 23 percent—described themselves as nondenominational, up from 18 percent in 1998.

Another part of the NCS study showed that congregations that “permit full-fledged membership for openly gay or lesbian couples in a committed relationship” climbed to 48 percent in 2012, up from 37 percent in 2006. The number of congregations allowing gay people in leadership roles also rose, from 18 percent to 26 percent.

Look in the aisles for changes in the way people worship. More people now attend congregations where drums are



LIVENING WORSHIP: Pastor Rick Behrens and Lisa Take perform a song during Sunday morning service at Grandview Park Presbyterian Church in Kansas City, Kansas.

played during the main service—up to 46 percent in 2012 from 25 percent in 1998.

Eighty percent of people attending black Protestant congregations reported that people jump, shout, or dance during the main service, up from 66 percent in 1998.

Although more people attend services where worshipers raise their hands during the main service (59 percent in 2012, up from 48 percent in 1998), all the increase was among Protestants, conservative or liberal.

Chaves speculates that in such worship there’s “more emphasis on generating a kind of religious experience as opposed to teaching religious knowledge or doctrine.”

Marcia McFee, a worship consultant and speaker who works with mainline churches on enhancing their services with light, sound, and motion, said, “For some, it doesn’t feel like a spiritual pursuit unless they’re engaged by dancing or drumming or raising a hand or absorbed in rich visuals,” McFee said. The Christian message should be a “deeply rich sensory experience,” so people “can embody that which we proclaim.”

At the same time, church choirs are on the decline in white Protestant churches, with 40 percent of conservative evangelicals saying they hear a choir at services, down from 63 percent in 1998. At liberal or moderate Protestant congregations, there’s a similar slide to 50 percent in 2012, down from 78 percent in 1998.

Sales for the music for choral anthems slid so deeply four years ago that

Abingdon Press, the United Methodist Church’s publishing arm, stopped buying new anthem music, said Mary Catherine Dean, associate publisher.

However, in black Protestant congregations, 90 percent of regular attendees say there’s a choir at the main service. The same is true for three in four Catholic worshipers.

Mary Preus, choir director at Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, blames “our culture of performance and expertise. We don’t sing anywhere else in our lives the way we once did. I grew up singing at home, in school, and at church every week. Now, people think they are not good enough to sing,” she said.

Preus has spent decades working to “revive the joy of singing” at Our Saviour’s. Choir members don’t stand in a special spot or wear special clothes, Preus said. “They just stand up wherever they are in the pews and sing.”

And because traditional choral music can be challenging for even the most talented of singers, she takes time to hunt down more accessible music, often drawing on music from Africa and Latin America.

Don’t count choirs out, said Eileen Guenther, professor of church music at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., and former president of the American Guild of Organists.

“There’s a reason choral music is called traditional,” Guenther said. “It’s been around a while. Contemporary music may not have as much staying power.” —Cathy Lynn Grossman, Religion News Service

Washington-based group rallies leaders to support Middle East Christians

A recent gathering shows how Middle Eastern Christians can put aside their disagreements and take up the cause of their beleaguered sisters and brothers, said Andrew Doran, executive director of In Defense of Christians.

"If Christian voices are able to ring out as one from Egypt to Syria to Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan, then we really do believe it will be possible for Middle Eastern Christians to survive," Doran said.

In Defense of Christians, a group based in Washington, was founded earlier this year to press the point that Christianity is endangered in the Middle East—its birthplace—and that "the survival of these historic Christian communities is not merely a moral imperative; it is in the interests of all nations and peoples."

The group organized a conference with prayer, speeches, and a lobbying push on Capitol Hill September 9–11 in Washington, D.C., for Christians from various traditions.

Bishop Angaelos, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church of England, called for

unwavering unity in combating the violence faced by Christians and other minorities in the region.

"We haven't seen this since the atrocities of Genghis Khan in the 13th century," Angaleos told several hundred people in a hotel ballroom.

There are about 12 million Christians in the Middle East—about 5 percent of the region's population—and they represent the second-largest religious group after Muslims. At the beginning of the 20th century, Christians represented about one in five Middle Easterners, but many have emigrated due to war and persecution.

Doran said the theme of this first IDC summit is the unity of Christians across the Middle East: the event opened with an ecumenical prayer service. But next year, at the second summit, the push will be for unity among U.S. Christians in defense of their Middle Eastern coreligionists.

Asked about the relative dearth of mainline Protestants at the conference, Doran said there were some, but he hoped more would get involved in the future alongside evangelicals, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and others.

Mainline Protestants have been relatively quieter in their advocacy for Middle Eastern Christians, said Mark Tooley, a Methodist conference attendee and president of the Washington-based

Institute on Religion and Democracy. There may be some mainline Protestants who may feel reluctant to cast stones, he said.

Doran said the cooperative spirit of the conference has been heartening, but that it does not mean that all are agreed on how the threat to Christians in the Middle East should be countered.

One Orthodox leader declared his opposition to military action to stop the Islamic State militants, a view that is not likely widely shared at the conference, Doran noted. The next day, another called the Arab-Israeli conflict the root of Middle Eastern chaos.

That speaker doesn't speak for the IDC nor his brother patriarchs, said Doran, adding, "But I don't think we would be inclined to censor that sort of comment. We welcome a diversity of thought."

Senator Ted Cruz (R., Tex.) was the keynote speaker at a gala in a hotel ballroom. His statement that "Christians have no greater ally than Israel" prompted boos and cries of "stop it!" and "enough" and "no!" as an increasingly louder crowd told him to get off the stage. Cruz tried to continue speaking, but many in the audience expressed anger when he included Hamas in the list of militants out to destroy religious minorities in the Middle East.

"Those who hate Jews hate Christians," Cruz said. "If those in this room will not recognize that, then my heart weeps. If you hate Jewish people, then you are not reflecting the teachings of Christ. And the very same people who persecute and murder Christians right now . . . are the very same people who target Jews for their faith."

Toufic Baaklini, IDC president, tried to quiet the crowd, but to little avail. After the incident he issued a statement decrying the outburst against Cruz.

"A few politically motivated opportunists chose to divide a room that for more than 48 hours sought unity in opposing the shared threat of genocide, faced not only by our Christian brothers and sisters, but our Jewish brothers and sisters," he wrote. The people seen as responsible "were made no longer welcome." —Lauren Markoe, Religion News Service

MUHAMMAD FALAH / GETTY IMAGES



A BELEAGUERED MINORITY: Iraqi Christians pray during Easter mass at St. Joseph Chaldean Church in 2009 in Baghdad.

Iraqi leaders created Islamic State and can end it, say Iraqi Sunnis

An Iraqi truck driver knows how Sunni militants are created in Iraq—he nearly became one.

Mohamed Abu Abed's account of suffering at the hands of Iraq's Shi'ite-dominated security forces and government over the years echoes among Iraq's minority Sunnis, who once held power under Saddam Hussein but have been pushed aside and often targeted since the 2003 American invasion.

Iraq's Sunnis began a popular uprising in December 2012, and in June this year they helped Islamic State militants advancing from Syria seize control of swaths of their own country.

President Barack Obama's military strategy against the IS in Iraq may focus on U.S. air strikes and revamped Iraqi armed forces working alongside Kurdish and Shi'ite militias. But to be successful, Obama has emphasized, it will also require steps by the new government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to change the Shi'ite-first policies of his predecessor and address Sunni grievances.

Many Sunnis say the roots of discontent are obvious, from the indiscriminate bombing of Sunni areas by the Iraqi military to the detaining of thousands of Sunnis without charge. The result is support for groups as radical as the IS.

"One hundred million percent, the [Iraqi] government created this problem," said Abu Abed, a truck driver from Abu Ghraib, west of Baghdad, who asked that his nickname be used.

His father and brother, both truck drivers, were killed by Shi'ite militia in September 2006 after they were stopped at illegal checkpoints.

Then in late 2006 Abu Abed was picked up with 34 others in a sweep by Iraqi military units of his neighborhood in Abu Ghraib, which along with nearby Fallujah was the heart of a Sunni and al-Qaeda insurgency against U.S. and Iraqi forces.

The military found nothing incriminating at Abu Abed's house but took him anyway. He was beaten hard the first day,

accused of being an insurgent but never charged, and held for two and a half years. Inside prison he heard the screams of those being tortured, as well as the vows of Sunni detainees that, once out, they would join the insurgency.

"For sure, I would have joined them," said Abu Abed, except that the killings of his father and brother left him in charge of caring for their families—a higher priority.

Sunnis grievances expanded with what Human Rights Watch calls the government's "indiscriminate" use of barrel bombs in Fallujah last spring. After the IS moved into Iraq, from early June to late July HRW documented 17 Iraqi government air strikes that used barrel bombs

and unguided air-dropped munitions on populated urban areas, all of them Sunni, leaving 75 civilians dead.

While many Iraqi Sunnis have been shocked by the sectarian violence and mass killings conducted by the IS in areas under their control, they are waiting to see if al-Abadi comes through on his promises of more inclusive rule.

"I don't care if our leader is a Sunni or Shi'ite—or even Jewish—as long as they are just," says Abu Rahman, an unemployed Sunni builder, who asked that only his nickname be used. "We've felt a very violent political and economic injustice. What is our crime? We are just Sunnis."—Scott Peterson, *The Christian Science Monitor*

Study: Southern pastors garner top salaries

LARGE CHURCHES in the South tend to pay their senior pastors the highest salaries, a new survey finds.

That's one of the conclusions on churches and finances released in September by Leadership Network, a Dallas-based church think tank, and the Vanderbloemen Search Group, a Houston-based search firm for churches and ministries.

Warren Bird, research director at Leadership Network, said pastors have long held a lofty place of authority in the South, and that may be why they are paid more. Northeastern churches are the second-highest paying, followed by the West and the Midwest. The lowest-paying part of North America is Canada.

The higher pastor salaries in the South contrast with lower-than-average wages for the region, according to the Department of Labor Bureau of Statistics.

A total of 727 North American churches with attendance ranging from 1,000 to more than 30,000 answered survey questions.

Researchers found that donations are slightly higher at those churches that pass the plate, but all churches in the study (available for free at leadnet.org/salary) offered more than one option for giving: 81 percent provide online giving options; 37 percent had a donation box in the lobby; and 25 percent had an electronic kiosk in the lobby. Congregations with more than 10,000 worshipers were least likely to pass offering plates.

Although researchers agreed not to divulge salaries of particular pastors or the identity of participating churches, they were able to determine trends in these congregations, which reflect about one-quarter of the nation's Protestant worshippers. For example:

- The larger the church, the more the senior pastor is likely to be paid.
- The second-in-command at many churches earns about 70 percent of the salary of the top executive.
- Three-quarters of the churches gave pay raises between 1 and 5 percent; the most common raise was 3 percent for 2014.

Towers Watson, a Virginia-based professional services company, also released a survey in September, finding that U.S. employers plan to give professional employees an average raise of 3 percent in 2015.

Bird said most congregations will get some kind of a report from their leaders about church finances.

"It is extremely rare that the entire congregation will be privy to specific salaries," he said.

But even people with inside knowledge about church salaries need to know more about how to handle their finances, said Holly Tate, director of business development at Vanderbloemen.

"Churches are known to fall behind in compensation trends, and they end up losing their staff because of it," she said.—Adelle M. Banks, Religion News Service

People



■ **Kent Brantly**, a missionary physician who survived Ebola (shown above working in Liberia), donated blood to another missionary physician who contracted the disease while working in West Africa. The World Health Organization has said that such transfusions—which also transfer disease-fighting antibodies—should be the top priority for research into new Ebola treatments.

Brantly, who had himself received a blood donation from a teenage survivor of Ebola in Liberia, had the same blood type as **Richard Sacra**, who was receiving treatment at the Nebraska Medical Center's bio-containment unit after being evacuated in early September. Both men had served in Monrovia, Liberia—Brantly with Samaritan's Purse and Sacra with SIM USA.

While there have been infections in Nigeria and Senegal, most of the epidemic's more than 5,000 cases and more than 2,600 deaths have been in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, according to the WHO. An unrelated outbreak of Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has sickened dozens, with 40 reported deaths as of mid-September.

Brantly gave testimony September 16 before a joint Senate hearing. From a written statement, he said, "This unprecedented outbreak began nine months ago but received very little attention from the international community until the events of mid-July when my friend and colleague, Nancy Writebol, and I became infected."

He applauded President Obama's

commitment to U.S. military support against Ebola.

"To control this outbreak and save the lives of thousands of West Africans," he said, "we need the United States to take the lead in providing large treatment facilities, skilled personnel, medical supplies, logistical support, mobile laboratories, and security. We also need to implement innovative community programs to stop the spread of the virus."

Brantly and Writebol, who also recovered, received an experimental drug called ZMapp. Supplies of ZMapp, which was in the early stages of development, have been exhausted, and it takes months to produce, according to its manufacturer. A Spanish priest who was infected while doing mission work in Liberia received the drug but died, according to news reports. Sacra also received an experimental therapy. Doctors have not revealed its name.



Richard Sacra

Liberia's more than 4 million people had a few dozen doctors before the outbreak. Virtually all other medical care stopped in the country because of the epidemic.

Debbie Sacra, Richard Sacra's wife, thanked God and science for her husband's recovery. He hopes that in the aftermath of the epidemic, the health-care system in Liberia can be rebuilt better than before, "so they're not at risk of this kind of disaster again," she said. "He will do everything he can from here on out to make sure this is true."
—*USA Today*; added sources

■ **Bruce Shipman**, chaplain for the Episcopal Church at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, resigned after comments he made on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict sparked a controversy.

In a letter to the *New York Times* responding to an op-ed about rising European anti-Semitism, Shipman wrote that "the best antidote to anti-Semitism would be for Israel's patrons abroad to press the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for final-status resolution to the Palestinian question."

Several readers interpreted Shipman's letter as an attempt to hold Jewish

people across the globe responsible for Israeli state actions.

"That was the last thing on my mind," Shipman told the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY*. "There's no question that anti-Semitism is a deeper and more complex problem."

Rather, his intention was to suggest that "a more hopeful situation in Israel-Palestine" would improve the situation for all. He noted that he has written letters to the editor throughout his ministry, not necessarily expecting them to be published.

Shipman had left retirement to take a two-year interim post with the Episcopal Church at Yale. One of his tasks was moving the executive committee of the board of governors into compliance with their by-laws, specifically observing term limits, he said.



Bruce Shipman

"When the letter was published, that group, the old guard, saw it as the last straw and didn't back me up," Shipman said. "The executive committee asked for my resignation at that time based on the publicity caused by the letter."

Though the committee could not have required his resignation, Shipman offered it September 3 to Connecticut Bishop Ian T. Douglas.

Douglas told Religion News Service that tensions between Shipman and other Episcopal leaders at Yale predated Shipman's letter to the *Times*.

"It causes me chagrin that people on both pro-Palestine and pro-Israel sides would jump on this circumstance and politicize it to their own ends," Douglas said.

Other members of the Episcopal Church at Yale's board of governors supported Shipman, both Douglas and Shipman said.

Linda Gaither of the Palestine Israel Network, which is part of the independent group Episcopal Peace Fellowship, has supported Shipman's comments and sees a growing divide between church leadership and church-related groups.

"We must differentiate between the need for all of us to stand firm against anti-Semitism," she said, and "the need to continue the Episcopal Church's stance against occupation." —Religion News Service

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, October 19

Isaiah 45:1–7; Matthew 22:15–22

IN MY FINAL YEAR of seminary, Marilynne Robinson came to campus. Officially she was there to visit and speak at the undergraduate college, but she indulged an invitation to an informal seminary gathering as well. Packed into our unsightly refectory, we sat riveted as she spoke about good preaching, the Bible, writing, and Calvinism.

On this last point Robinson openly relished the unspoken challenge posed by a group of Calvin-averse Episcopalians. I don't remember what specific question a student raised about predestination or total divine providence. Whatever it was, it was obliterated by Robinson's response: imagine you are faced with grieving parents whose young child has died in a seemingly random and tragic accident. Which is more comforting, to assert that all of this is somehow in God's hands or to indicate that their child had slipped through some sort of ontological crack?

Robinson's piercing gaze scanned the silent room, daring us to defend a theology that would leave God occasionally out of control. No one spoke. Checkmate, Calvin.

Of course, I have been similarly moved in the other direction as well—convinced by testimonies of sorrow and searching that found a resting place in a vision of God whose power is small to control but unlimited to redeem. It often feels like a rhetorical game, this question of what belongs to God. How wide is a good God's providence? Does it include darkness and woe? How deep can the suffering go before we squirm at the idea that this, too, is in God's hands? And how much do the rise and fall of world leaders in all their awful variety reflect God's favor and design?

Barbara Brown Taylor's most recent book, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, opens with Isaiah 45:3: "I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the LORD." Taylor offers lovely reflections on the value of exploring—rather than running from—loss and unknowing. I'm troubled, however, by the sense of a high security fence around her moon garden of darkness discoveries. It is indeed valuable to uncover "a deeper reverence for the cloud of unknowing, a greater ability to abide in God's absence, and . . . a fresh baptism in the truth that loss is the way of life." But it is quite another to search for God's fingerprints on bloody and lucrative conquests of empire.

Isaiah points to just such fingerprints on the runaway successes of Cyrus, the comparatively benevolent Persian emperor. Crudely put, the promised "treasures of darkness" have more to do with booty than beatific vision. Verse seven ends this selection with a concise statement of God's providence: "I

form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the LORD do all these things."

On the heel of so much talk of military triumph and humiliated neighbors, this picture of darkness and woe is very social and very physical. This is no solitary dark night of the soul. What about these shades of darkness that go deeper than unknowing and loss? The violence that pierces human flesh? Acts so dark that the word *evil* comes to mind, even among middle-class postmodernists?

Americans powerful and common have often interpreted our own victories through a lens of manifest destiny. Russian president Vladimir Putin has been accused of his own brand of manifest destiny as well. After reading all summer about Russia's relations with the West over embattled Ukraine, the coveted Crimean peninsula, and the downed Malaysian Airlines flight MH-17, I thought of Putin when I read Isaiah 45. How would he read this text? How would it read to his supporters in Ukraine?

This is also a passage about God working through a foreign leader for the benefit of Israel. Perhaps it should raise raw questions about the latest war in Gaza—and about American military aid to Israel, bankrolled by our own past and present treasures.

Into this obfuscated picture of God's mysterious providence, Jesus' words in Matthew 22 offer some relief. They do not neatly resolve the matter. They do not divide the world into boxes marked "God's" and "not God's." Yet an ancient interpretive lens reminds me that not everything on this good earth is of equal interest to God. The denarius bears the image of Caesar; thus it belongs to Caesar. Let him have those lifeless coins, Jesus says. But that which bears God's image—human beings of every tribe and tongue—belongs to God. The value of the coin is diminished; the value of every human life is enriched. In my clinical pastoral education group, an astute colleague noticed that I seem allergic to ascribing any suffering to God's will. So yes: God is probably not as gentle as I imagine. But I remain convicted that God loves all human beings, and their Spirit-bearing flesh, with passion.

If this week's readings indicate one thing clearly, it might be this: tread carefully when speaking of God's domain. Yet we are not left speechless. Jesus' words order our lives not by marking off segments of the world as outside God's purview, but by teaching us that everything we do or create—even our very manner of being—is rightly oriented toward God. What belongs to God? In the face of evil and violence, I am not ready to say *everything*. But each and every human life? Yes, we belong to God, whether we are dirt-poor or powerful dictators. And we are ultimately in the palm of God's hand.

Yet we have some freedom as to how far we wander from that blessed palm: give to God what is God's. The divisions may be difficult to discern, but the choice remains.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, October 26

*Leviticus 19:1–2, 15–18; Matthew 22:34–46;
1 Thessalonians 2:1–8*

WHEN I WAS fresh out of college and chock-full of vocational angst, I was lucky enough to be invited into a book club composed primarily of working and retired pastors, therapists, and professors. One evening over tea and cookies, as this multigenerational group of women delved (somewhat) into the book and (more fully) into the issues of our lives, my angst spilled over into earnest whining: *But what are we to do? How are we to live? It's so complicated!*

The response that followed has lingered in my memory. A Catholic theologian in her sixties with short, curly hair looked at me. “Oh, but we *have* been given a simple code,” she said. “Love God, love your neighbor. When things get overwhelming for me, I repeat again and again: Love God, love your neighbor. Love God, love your neighbor. This is all that’s really asked of us.”

A few days later, I was taking a winter walk on the beach and came across the unlikely gift of a big and beautiful labyrinth a stranger had left in the sand. Still feeling pretty confused and tormented, I began to walk the labyrinth, repeating those words like a mantra: *Love God, love your neighbor*. Tellingly, I don’t remember exactly what “next step” emerged for me, but I do remember that as I prayed and walked, those simple words seemed to unlock a door. I left the beach with clarity and relief, the simplicity of the commandment releasing the weighty pressures of countless social codes and expectations.

This teaching of the two greatest commandments is Jesus’ gentle yoke. In Jesus’ time, a rabbi’s “yoke” was a set of teachings—that which was required of you under the law according to a particular teacher. The “easy and gentle” yoke of our Lord—who can often be read as quite demanding—makes most sense to me in light of this historical factoid and this week’s lesson: we yearn for clarity about what is essential, and we long to be guided toward the things that really matter.

It is an aspect of the gospel so basic that it is easily overlooked by preachers. In my early-twenties vocational crisis, I was already a confirmed and hopeless church nerd. I’d heard lots of sermons, been to lots of Bible studies. Yet the liberating force of this basic discipleship teaching hit me like a fresh gust of wind on stagnant sails. Similar memories are scattered throughout my life: I realize that I have been surprised by the grace of this greatest-commandments gospel again and again.

It is not the foundational gospel of resurrection and shouldn’t replace it. But for all who are trying their darnedest in a world full of dubious codes for righteous living, this teaching remains good news.

Glennon Doyle Melton—author of *Carry On, Warrior* and the popular Momastery blog—wrote a post in August called “Give Me Gratitude or Give Me Debt.” After receiving unsolicited advice that she should update her kitchen, Melton aims to cultivate gratitude for the bounty of her North American life with new “perspectacles.” Talking about her microwave, she says, “This is the magical box in which I put *uncooked* stuff, push some buttons, and then a minute later—pull out *cooked* stuff. It is like the JETSONS up in here.”

Melton experiences gratitude as liberty from desire: “*I will not be a slave to the Tyranny of Trend any longer*. I am almost 40 years old and no catalog is the Boss of Me anymore.” The gospel offers all sorts of liberation to all sorts of people, and many seem weightier than middle-class psychological unbundling. But don’t dismiss the liberation of those ensnared by consumerism. I’ve been there many times; if you haven’t, count that a special grace from God. The powers of marketing are real. We need the Spirit’s help and a good word to walk through a store with such a freedom intact. Melton offers a testimony many hunger for.

But what is the difference between this liberty born of gratitude and the liberty offered by the greatest commandments? They function similarly, yet ultimately a liberating code that includes the prayerful love of God and neighbor will be richer and more robust than thanksgiving alone—and more complicated. Simple does not mean easy, and simple commandments have complicated implications. Judging from the holiness code of Leviticus 19, this paradox has always been the case. What does it look like in 2014, in this place, to love your neighbor? To love God above all else? Whenever I think that these are tired old questions, I know I am not really paying attention.

How did I love my poor neighbor today? Did I even think about my poor neighbor? In what ways do I continue to defer to the ways and the will of the “successful” class? Paul knows that even proclaiming the gospel to new faces can be an occasion for greed and false flattery. Living by a different holiness code than the ones on offer from contemporary culture takes discernment. It also takes courage. We are freed from expectations we find onerous. But we also may be required to give up praise and positions that gladden our egos.

The author is Laurel Mathewson, a curate at St. Paul’s Episcopal Cathedral in San Diego.

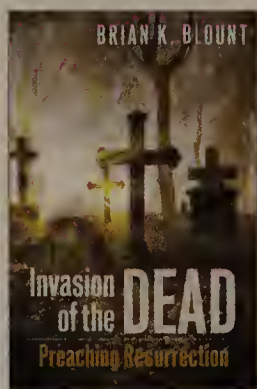
TAKE & READ

Scholars recommend the best recently published books in their fields.

New Testament

***Invasion of the Dead: Preaching Resurrection*, by Brian K. Blount** (Westminster John Knox, 156 pp., \$16.00 paperback).

Our reluctance to engage apocalyptic eschatology renders the gospel moralistic and largely unable to speak about death. That's a tragic failure of theological creativity for a people navigating a culture that is fixated on death and doomsday scenarios. With incisive and enlivening tours through Revelation, Paul, and Mark, Blount calls preachers to hold resurrection as the center of Christian proclamation—not resurrection as life restored and thus a retort to death, but as life achieved through death and thus a dismantling of death itself. In resurrection we encounter a God who loves the world and its population too much to leave them prey to destructive forces.



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***Unholy Allegiances: Heeding Revelation's Warning*, by David A. deSilva** (Hendrickson, 144 pp., \$19.95 paperback).

With a new *Left Behind* film on the horizon, this accessible volume can be a timely and useful resource to those who don't know what to make of the last book in the Bible. Neither a commentary nor a guidebook, it prepares readers to engage Revelation with one eye on its historical context and another on the things that may inhibit the church's faithful witness today. Chapters explain the Roman propaganda machine, Revelation's pointed criticism of Rome's imperialistic excesses, the pastoral and prophetic dimensions of the letters to the seven churches, popular ways of misinterpreting Revelation, and Revelation's depiction of God's power and resolve to establish peace.

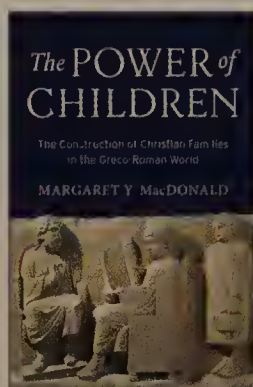


***Sense and Stigma in the Gospels: Depictions of Sensory-Disabled Characters*, by Louise J. Lawrence** (Oxford University Press, 208 pp., \$27.95 paperback).

It's one thing to understand from a historical perspective why biblical writings employ language about blindness, deafness, and polluted or malodorous conditions as metaphors for spiritual ignorance or deficiency. But how can our interpretation of texts, especially those that involve culturally marginalized characters interacting with Jesus in the Gospels, go beyond merely reifying the problematic and condescending premises at the roots of those

metaphors? Lawrence introduces insights from sensory anthropology and discovers in these characters agency and personhood that challenge our presumptions about what or who is normal.

***Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*, by Amy-Jill Levine** (HarperOne, 320 pp., \$25.99). Parables challenge assumptions. They disturb and reorient us, often in unexpected ways. Unfortunately we stifle their potential to do this, or we use them to sting others, when we don't pay close attention to their historical-cultural setting. This exploration of 11 parables discredits many of the stereotypes we often bring to the Gospels concerning ancient Judaism and other cultural expressions. Characteristically witty and attentive to detail without becoming overly technical, Levine has written one of those rare books that is able to instruct and raise questions for a wide range of laypeople, pastors, and scholars.



***The Power of Children: The Construction of Christian Families in the Greco-Roman World*, by Margaret Y. MacDonald** (Baylor University Press, 248 pp., \$49.95).

In antiquity, children were ever present. Both neglected and treasured, they were students, workers, brides and (less frequently) grooms, slaves, orphans, objects of sexual gratification, and raw material for imperial propaganda. They were also consistently welcome

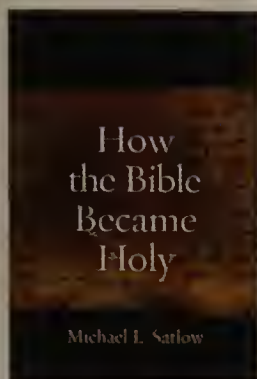
in the church, a family headed by God the Father. This splendid, illuminating study explores how Christian households socialized and taught children of various kinds. MacDonald rereads the pastoral epistles and the household codes of Colossians, Ephesians, and 1 Peter with attention to the identities and experiences of children of ancient times. She puts these notorious texts in a new light, while fostering deeper knowledge of the complexities involved in early Christianity's self-definition.

***Love in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study*, by Francis J. Moloney** (Baker Academic, 272 pp., \$34.99).

In John 17:26, Jesus prays that his Father's love for him would also be in his disciples, that they would share in this intimacy. What might that look like? Moloney guides readers into how the fourth Gospel works—not as a discourse about love and relationship in the abstract but as a demonstration of

Selected by Matthew L. Skinner, who teaches New Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

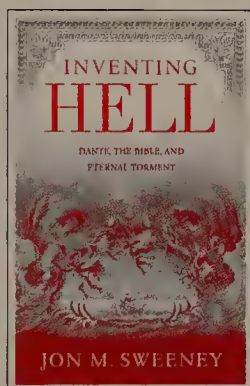
love performed in Jesus' self-giving behavior and especially his death. Though the title may recall an isolated word study from methodological days gone by, this book encompasses and integrates John's entire narrative and overarching theological vision.



***How the Bible Became Holy*, by Michael L. Satlow** (Yale University Press, 368 pp., \$35.00). We know that opinions about biblical authority and interpretation tend to fuel disagreement. In a rapid survey of how the notion of textual authority developed in Judaism and Christianity from the divided monarchy through the early rabbinic period, Satlow contends that religious texts were initially granted only very

limited authority and that a strong sense of "normative authority" didn't gain traction until the third century CE. Although the thesis is controversial and hampered by a nebulous position on what counts as evidence for normative authority, the book reminds us that the question of what it means to deem texts authoritative has always been contested and deeply complicated.

***Inventing Hell: Dante, the Bible, and Eternal Torment*, by Jon M. Sweeney** (Jericho Books, 208 pp., \$16.00 paperback). The Bible offers little support for many common views of hell. Jon Sweeney insists that Dante's *Inferno* has more thoroughly influenced popular imagination. But what informed Dante? In a chummy voice, this pleasantly quirky volume scans varied perspectives on death and the afterlife found in the Old Testament, the New Testament, Greek epic and other influential writings, the Qur'an, Aquinas, and Dante. Newcomers to this diverse literature will find the book an inquisitive and theologically relevant conversation starter about the difficulty of tracking myths' migrations across cultures and about their ability to spawn new myths for pondering the unknowable.



***The Church According to Paul: Rediscovering the Community Conformed to Christ*, by James W. Thompson** (Baker Academic, 304 pp., \$26.99 paperback). How should the church change to meet current and future challenges? That depends on what the church's God-given identity and purpose are. This smart investigation of Pauline ecclesiology contends that today's would-be reformers can learn much from the apostle's views. Churches are called to participate in God's commitment to transform humanity, both by venturing out and by attracting others into their fold. Because Paul's letters—both undisputed and disputed—devote themselves so thoroughly to the task of forming distinctive communities, James Thompson's analysis interacts extensively with many prominent Pauline themes.



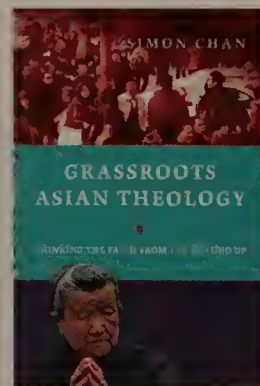
***The True Herod*, by Geza Vermes** (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 216 pp., \$35.00). Replete with stunning color photographs and riveting prose, this final book from Vermes, a noted authority on the time of Jesus, brings ancient political history to life and deftly summarizes what archaeology, Josephus, and other sources tell us about the deeds and character of Herod the

Great. As fun as it is simply to marvel at Herod's outsized ego and political brilliance, we also benefit from considering the deep imprint he left on economic and religious life in Judea and neighboring regions. Books like this deeply enrich our study of the New Testament by opening up the intricate sociopolitical realities that the Gospels and Acts take for granted.

Global Christianity & American religious history

***The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution*, by John L. Allen Jr.** (Image, 320 pp., \$25.00). Thankfully the West has become a little more aware of the violence and mayhem directed against Christians globally, but Allen's catalog of atrocities stuns and enrages nonetheless. It gains its power from the author's very wide knowledge of conflicts around the world, and also from his refusal to focus excessively on any one culprit. Had it been written by a more simplistic author, *The Global War on Christians* could have turned into an anti-Islamic tract, which this certainly is not. Read and weep.

***Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up*, by Simon Chan** (IVP Academic, 217 pp., \$22.00 paperback). Particularly in charismatic forms, Christianity has spread widely across Asia in recent years. Plenty of elite and academic authors have interpreted the emerging faith, but it is a pleasure to read Chan's account of the thought world of ordinary believers and their communities. Just how are concepts like the Trinity and the work of the Holy Spirit presented in Asian contexts? Chan does an admirable job of addressing Catholic and Orthodox traditions, as well as Protestant and Pentecostal.



Selected by Philip Jenkins, who teaches at Baylor University, and Grant Wacker, who teaches American religion at Duke Divinity School.

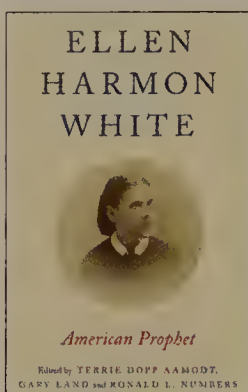


Michaelson suggests that we should see each and every migrant as a potential missionary.

***The Rebirth of Latin American Christianity*, by Todd Hartch** (Oxford University Press, 304 pp., \$24.95 paperback). In recent decades, Latin America has witnessed an upsurge of new forms of evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity, which has in turn provoked Catholic revival movements. Hartch's book gives us a valuable and accessible survey of these trends, covering both Catholic and Protestant aspects. He also discusses modern developments in terms of the deeper history of the continent and its original phases of Christianization.

***From Every Tribe and Nation: A Historian's Discovery of the Global Christian Story*, by Mark A. Noll** (Baker Academic, 224 pp., \$19.99 paperback). If you are looking for a single book

to guide you through the emerging study of world Christianity, this should be the one. Noll packs a remarkable amount of material into a short space, including a moving account of his personal discovery of the wider Christian world. His breadth of cultural knowledge continues to amaze and delight. This is going to be a classic in the field.



copies in 165 languages. Adventists now number 18 million adherents and boast some of the largest education, hospital, publishing, and missionary programs in the world. This volume of scholarly essays, crafted by nearly two dozen distinguished scholars from both inside and outside the tradition, addresses multiple aspects of White's life, legacy, and social and cultural environment. All of the contributions are deeply researched, fluidly written, and imaginatively argued. (Full disclosure: I wrote a very brief foreword for this substantial and remarkably wide-ranging volume.—GW)

***Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*, edited by Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers** (Oxford University Press, 400 pp., \$34.95 paperback). Ellen Harmon White (1827–1915), the effective founder of the Seventh-day Adventists, is one of the most creative and influential figures in American religious history. She was a prolific writer. One book alone, *Steps to Christ*, saw a circulation of 100 million

***Redeemer: The Life of Jimmy Carter*, by Randall Balmer** (Basic Books, 304 pp., \$27.99). Once again Balmer proves that he is one of the finest narrative historians in the business. In this fast-paced biography of Jimmy Carter, he weaves social and especially political history into a revealing examination of the powerful role that evangelical faith played in Carter's life. Balmer persuasively argues that Carter found his true role—his ministry, if you will—after he left the presidency, in his compassionate endeavors and forceful advocacy of human rights. Balmer does not hide his admiration for Carter, but he also candidly acknowledges Carter's political missteps. In the deeply moving epilogue, Balmer describes a recent personal visit with Carter and offers a theologically informed rumination on the meaning of Carter's life.

***After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History*, by David A. Hollinger** (Princeton University Press, 248 pp., \$29.95).

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288 pages, paperback, 978-0-8308-4063-2, \$24.00

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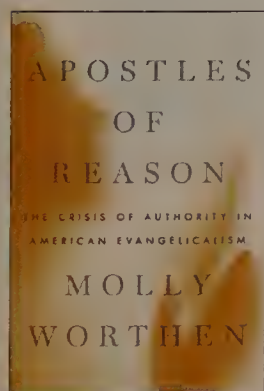
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In these tightly argued, elegantly written interlocking essays, Hollinger, one of America's premier historians, examines the career of liberal Protestantism in the United States. He argues that the numerical decline of the mainline, which began in the 1960s, has been accompanied by steady growth in its influence on broadly progressive currents in American life. The mainline's solicitude for equality, justice, and pluralism expressed itself in social movements that pursued those same goals through secular means. The gem in the volume is an autobiographical essay in which Hollinger charts his own pilgrimage from the provincial German Baptist Brethren faith of his youth to the secular cosmopolitan view that has informed his appreciation of the mainline's enduring strength.

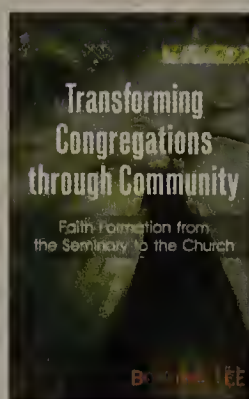
Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel, by Kate Bowler (Oxford University Press, 352 pp., \$34.95). *Blessed* tracks the history of the millions of believers who have turned to megachurch pastors and televangelists in search of spiritual, physical, and financial abundance. Reviews of the book brim with superlatives: "tour de force," "razor sharp," "expertly executed," and "stunningly empathetic." Bowler shows how the prosperity gospel movement has drawn from multiple denominational, racial, ethnic, and even secular subtraditions. She identifies both the dazzling diversity and the common understandings that have given the prosperity gospel coherence. Though the focus is primarily American, Bowler looks at Canadian and developing world versions too. She treats prosperity partisans, especially laity, with respect, and with remarkable subtlety she shows how to appreciate the human texture of the story without endorsing all of the prosperity gospel's theological claims.



Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism, by Molly Worthen (Oxford University Press, 376 pp., \$27.95). This book's virtues are many. The prose alone—consistently clear and vigorous, and sparkling with memorable turns of phrase—is worth the price of admission. Worthen argues that evangelicals' core identity lies in a common set of questions about authority, especially about

the role of the Bible and the Bible's accuracy. She shifts the focus from tired discussions about culture wars and kitsch trends to a respectful, though not uncritical, analysis of the serious ideas that energized the evangelical movement. It is a singular accomplishment.

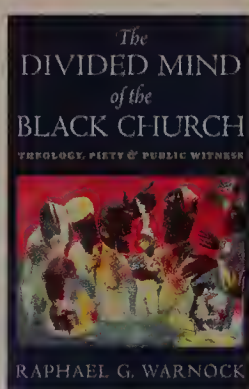
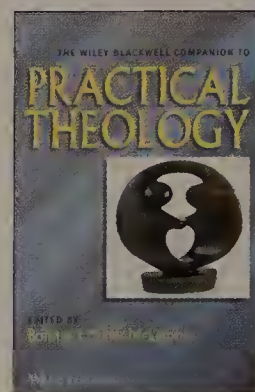
Practical theology



Transforming Congregations through Community: Faith Formation from the Seminary to the Church, by Boyung Lee (Westminster John Knox, 164 pp., \$20.00 paperback). In this highly accessible work, pastor and seminary professor Lee offers readers a vision, plus practical guidance for helping mainline congregations become vital and faithful communities in the 21st century. Central to her project is the call to build authentic community as an alternative to the excessive individualism that is choking relationships among God's people. She engages multiple disciplines, including congregational studies, religious education, theology, and postcolonial critical theory, to make a sound and compelling case for the future of religious life.

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The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology, edited by Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Wiley-Blackwell, 640 pp., \$54.95 paperback). Drawing primarily on North American and northern European viewpoints, the contributors to this edited volume address topics ranging from methods for doing practical theology to the lived experiences of believers that embody it. Educators will find a valuable framework for engaging students in the discipline of practical theology, and leaders of faith communities will recognize their indispensable role in articulating religious experiences and the theology that emanates from particular settings.



The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness, by Raphael G. Warnock (New York University Press, 276 pp., \$30.00). This well-written and meticulously researched treatment of black church piety and social engagement is a timely and pivotal assessment as we head into the next chapter of American religious life. Tracing the history of and tensions among black theology, pastors, and congregations, Warnock contends that it is urgent that the aims of piety and protest move into full dialogue in various academic and ecclesial communities. Warnock's acknowledgment of womanist theologians and their offerings to this discourse is a welcome highlight of the book. Although he focuses on the

congregations, Warnock contends that it is urgent that the aims of piety and protest move into full dialogue in various academic and ecclesial communities. Warnock's acknowledgment of womanist theologians and their offerings to this discourse is a welcome highlight of the book. Although he focuses on the

Selected by Sharon G. Thornton, professor emerita at Andover Newton Theological School and author of Broken yet Beloved: A Pastoral Theology of the Cross (Chalice).

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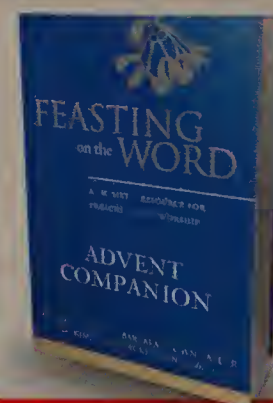
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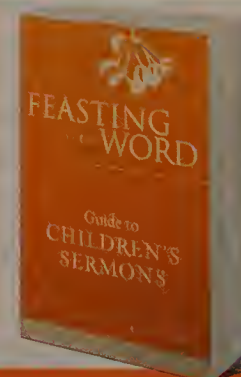
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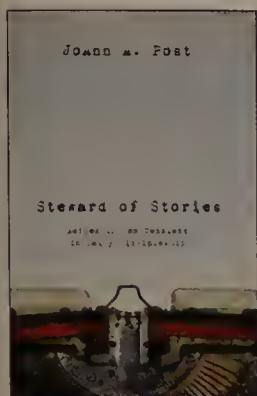
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black church, Warnock is writing for a broader audience in order to motivate all people of faith toward a deeper engagement in public theology and to forge a more sustainable, just, and peaceful world.

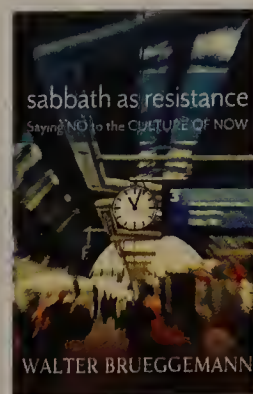


***Steward of Stories: Reflecting on Tensions in Daily Discipleship*, by JoAnn A. Post** (Resource Publications, 172 pp., \$20.00 paperback). A seasoned Lutheran pastor honestly and vulnerably reflects on various pastoral situations she has encountered during her thirtysome years on the job. This lively, spirit-filled reading of a pastor's daily life will inspire and encourage readers in all facets of congregational work.

***Should We Live Forever? The Ethical Ambiguities of Aging*, by Gilbert Meilaender** (Eerdmans, 135 pp., \$18.00 paperback). With the baby boomers fast becoming the aging boomers, Meilaender has written a timely reflection on the question of whether humans should live forever. In this thoughtful and comprehensive exploration of ethical ambiguities related to growing old, he examines popular orientations to aging, life prolongation, and age retardation and reaches the conclusion that despite the unavoidable losses that aging brings, a certain

patience infused with hope in God can bring the believer to the close of life with a deep sense of gratitude.

***Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*, by Walter Brueggemann** (Westminster John Knox, 108 pp., \$14.00 paperback). A well-timed word from a familiar sage. Short and to the point, this bit of vintage Brueggemann lifts up the commandment to observe the sabbath so as to reimagine and restore right relations, or covenant, between neighbors and God. Sabbath rest invites us to imagine an alternative to endless and mindless striving, producing, and consuming. Drawing primarily on the Exodus narrative, Brueggemann reveals uncanny parallels with the current economic reality in the United States. Here sabbath rest is not a luxury or an escape, but a chance to resist the forces that would rob our lives of vitality and meaning. Sabbath as resistance says "enough is more than enough."



***Barefoot Theology: A Dictionary for Pilgrims, Priests, and Poets*, by Rachael A. Keefe** (Wipf and Stock, 204 pp., \$22.00 paperback). This lovely volume is a unique blend of scripture, poetry, and theological reflection that will enter your heart, stir your soul, and speak to your mind. Keefe is a fresh voice beck-

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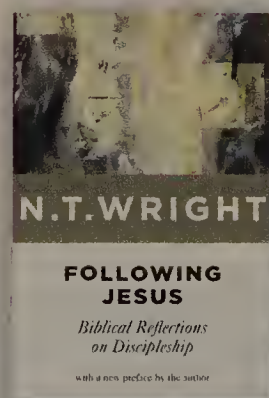
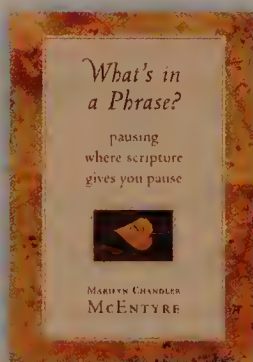
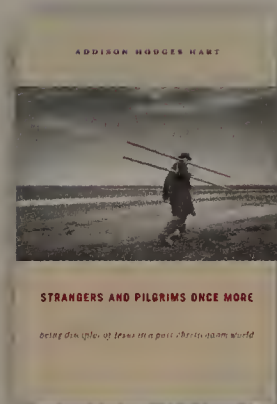
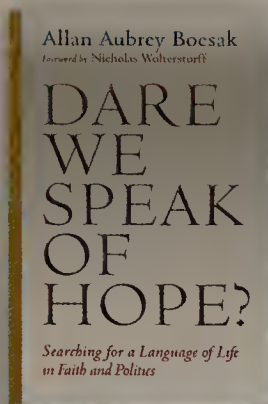
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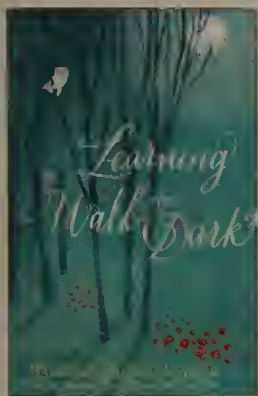
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***Learning to Walk in the Dark*, by Barbara Brown Taylor** (HarperOne, 208 pp., \$24.99). Taylor leads her readers off taken-for-granted and well-illuminated paths into dimly lit night regions of the world and of the soul. Through her stories, images, and courageous wanderings she articulates the doubts and worries that many experience. Taking seriously the real and imagined fears of both believers and

nonbelievers, she coaxes readers to discover and explore the gifts of midnight—all the while holding them steady as a wise and competent guide.

***City of God: Faith in the Streets*, by Sara Miles** (Jericho Books, 224 pp., \$20.00). Through the lens of a service of ashes shared on the streets of San Francisco's Mission District, Miles introduces readers to what she calls "heaven on earth." She reveals a crowded heaven layered with many languages,

multiple heartaches, and small victories in the face of great odds. Packed with stories of the faith and fortitude of real people, the book reads like a novel, but one too vivid not to be true. Writing with the expressive vocabulary of one who has discovered her faith firsthand, Miles weaves together stories of her discovery of God and her vocation, of the ministry of her home parish, and of the people she has met along the way.

***Bishops on the Border: Pastoral Responses to Immigration*, by Mark Adams, Minerva Carcaño, Gerald Kicanas, Kirk Smith, and Stephen Talmage** (Morehouse, 160 pp., \$18.00 paperback). Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Methodist bishops tell of their experiences on the border between Arizona and Mexico. After an extended introduction that recounts the history of this ever-changing region—its people, its politics, and the policies that have shaped the border's meaning—the four bishops share how their lives and ministries have been affected and changed by their encounters. Their reflections are primarily autobiographical and are filled with vivid descriptions and powerful stories of the situations they have experienced and the people they have met. Their accounts invite communities of faith to recognize the deep suffering that is occurring every day on the border and to reexamine their mission and commitments in order to become involved in addressing the current crisis.

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BOOKS FOR MINISTRY

Seven pastors pick the 21st-century works they've found most helpful.

BRIAN McLAREN

Pastors need to have some sense of the historical context of what's going on in the church. Diana Butler Bass's *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (HarperOne) and Phyllis Tickle's *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Baker) will inform, unsettle, challenge, and inspire you.

Ministry to and with children and youth often gets the leftovers of pastoral attention. In *Faith Forward: A Dialogue on Children, Youth, and a New Kind of Christianity* (Woodlake), editors David Csinos and Melvin Bray have brought together leaders who are thinking in fresh ways about "the last and least"—who should be the first and greatest in pastoral priorities.

Congregational leaders need to teach members the disciplines of Christian faith, but too often they haven't been taught these practices themselves. Tony Jones's short, lucid, and accessible book *The Sacred Way* (Zondervan) is still my favorite introduction to the subject.

Typically pastors don't learn about hiring, evaluating, and firing staff; budgeting and working with banks; planning and leading staff meetings; or dealing with disgruntled members. *Simply Strategic Stuff: Help for Leaders Drowning in the Details of Running a Church*, by Tim Stevens and Tony Morgan (Group Publishing), touches all the stuff that makes pastors sweat—stuff that is a bigger deal than it at first appears.

Preaching in the Inventive Age, by Doug Pagitt (Abingdon), is an excellent place to start on Pagitt's Inventive Age series. Many preachers have a miniature seminary professor perched on one shoulder, whispering homiletical rules in their ear. They need Pagitt perched on their other shoulder, whispering his challenges to conventional homiletics.

BECCA STEVENS

A series of essays on homiletics, worship, Christian education, pastoral care, and practical theology, Edward Farley's *Practicing Gospel* (Westminster John Knox) reminds us that ministry should be rooted not in popular psychology or dazzling public speaking, but in a transforming God. He grounds practice in a struggle with the mystery of God's salvific work.

Fredrica Harris Thompsett believes that we are all natural theologians: we are all able to think through questions of belief and relate our answers to our personal and communal lives. In *We Are Theologians* (Seabury) she works through historical and biblical resources that can guide us in continuing theological reflection on the faith that informs ministry.

Oswald Chambers once said, "Prayer does not fit us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work." More than a guidebook for those who want to learn about the practice of centering prayer (although it is that), Cynthia Bourgeault's *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* (Cowley) shows us how centering prayer connects with the tradition of Christian contemplation and can lead to a renewed form of Christian practice.

Enuma Okoro's memoir *Reluctant Pilgrim: A Moody, Somewhat Self-Indulgent Introvert's Search for Spiritual Community* (Fresh Air Books) gives voice to those struggling to reconcile their faith with the worship service that surrounds them. She recounts the many places along her journey where her search for Christian community ended in disappointment and marginalization.

Gordon Peerman's *Blessed Relief: What Christians Can Learn from Buddhists about Suffering* (SkyLight Paths) focuses on nine Buddhist teachings and the practices that cultivate compassion, presence, and acceptance. His balancing of contemplation and action yields tools for sustaining a heart that can respond to and relieve suffering.

OTIS MOSS III

Anne Jackson's personal account of her struggle with burnout and her road to recovery, *Mad Church Disease: Overcoming the Burnout Epidemic* (Zondervan) is a pragmatic and cautionary tale for all engaged in ministry. With humor and honesty, she pulls back the veil on the myths that the church creates about the purpose and role of the minister.

Reading Eugene Peterson is akin to sitting on the front porch with a wise grandfather, mesmerized by his firsthand knowledge of events, people, and places. *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ* (Eerdmans) finds a place on my shelf as part devotional, part Bible study, and part collection of down-home wisdom from an elder who knows my struggles.

Brian McLaren is author of *We Make the Road by Walking: A Year-Long Quest for Spiritual Formation, Reorientation, and Activation*.

Becca Stevens is an Episcopal priest, founder of the not-for-profit *Thistle Farms*, and author of *Snake Oil: The Art of Healing and Truth-Telling*.

Otis Moss III is senior pastor at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago.

April Yamasaki is lead pastor of Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, British Columbia, and author of *Sacred Pauses: Spiritual Practices for Personal Renewal*.

Ayanna Johnson Watkins is a minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) who has served as a pastor, seminary administrator, and conference speaker on preaching, justice, and leadership.

Carol Howard Merritt is author of *Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation* and blogs regularly for the *CENTURY*.

Bradley N. Hill is lead pastor of Selah Covenant Church in Selah, Washington.

The brothers Chip and Dan Heath have written a business book that is applicable to the church as well. *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard* (Crown Business) examines corporations and organizational psychology to get to the core of the question, How does one create successful change in a difficult environment? This book would be very helpful for a minister who is new in the pastorate or is attempting to make significant changes.

In *The Choice: Living Your Passion Inside Out* (Hope For Life International), Frank Thomas takes us through his transition from megachurch pastor to seminary professor. This is not a tale of trauma but a reflective story of the joy of learning to discover the true heart of one's ministry and gifts.

APRIL YAMASAKI

Tradition and innovation, inreach and outreach, nurture and transformation, strong clergy leadership and strong lay leadership—instead of treating these and other polarities as problems, Roy Oswald and Barry Johnson work with them as ongoing realities. Their book *Managing Polarities in Congregations: Eight Keys for Thriving Faith Communities* (Rowman & Littlefield) explores the upsides and downsides of each, and how can we best manage them.

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun's *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (InterVarsity Press) is a comprehensive survey of spiritual disciplines and a wonderful resource for the inner life of those who practice ministry. Among the disciplines discussed are Bible study, caring for the earth, confession, discernment, hospitality, and journaling.

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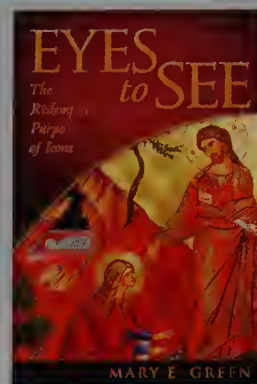
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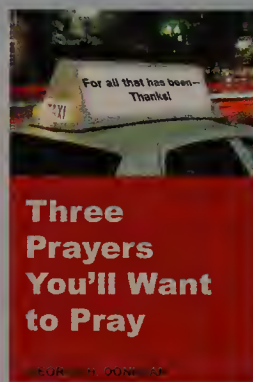
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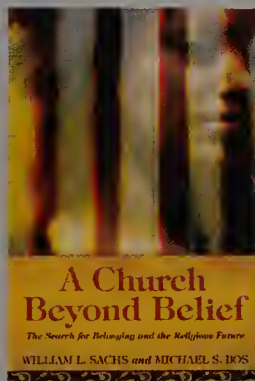


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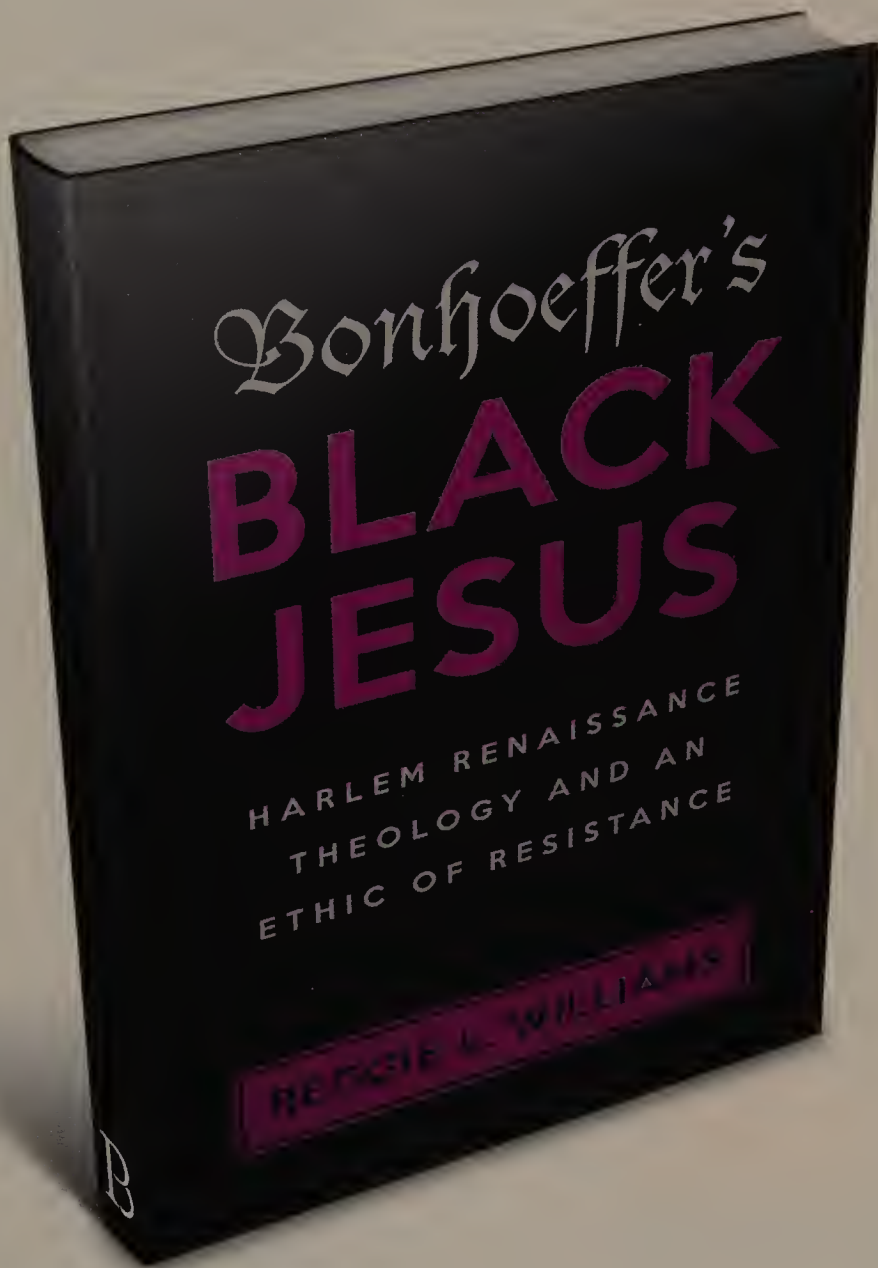


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Writing in the United Kingdom from an Anabaptist perspective, Stuart and Sian Murray Williams begin *The Power of All: Building a Multivoiced Church* (Herald) with the biblical vision of a multivoiced church where the gifts of all contribute to the whole. They describe how the church was historically overtaken by a more monovoiced model and make a case for a church that is multivoiced in worship, learning, discernment, and community. Our church staff found it an excellent catalyst for thinking about our context for ministry.

Christena Cleveland's *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart* (InterVarsity Press) is an excellent introduction to group behavior, identity building, and related dynamics. She goes beyond simply "uncovering the hidden forces" of disunity to offer practical examples and suggestions for moving forward.

AYANNA JOHNSON WATKINS

Nadia Bolz-Weber deftly weaves together scripture with the text of her own life and the lives around her in a way that is disarmingly authentic and full of the grace I long for daily in my own experience of ministry. *Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner and Saint* (Jericho) bears witness to the presence of God in the middle of mess after tragic, hilarious mess.

While meetings can be founts of creativity, productivity, and brilliant communication, they can also be plodding, demoralizing, and organizationally fatal. *Death by Meeting: A Leadership Fable about Solving the Most Painful Problem in Business*, by Patrick Lencioni (Jossey-Bass), argues in story form that it is possible to consistently have the former kind. Lencioni's fable is set in a fictitious corporate environment, but its principles carry over easily into ministry settings.

In *The Art of Community: Building the New Age of Participation* (O'Reilly Media), Jono Bacon acknowledges the fragmentation of community in general and describes how he accidentally created a totally unexpected and highly functional community made up entirely of open-source software creators online. He discusses what is at the heart of community and how to foster, nurture, and protect it. This is as much a book on leadership as it is on the making of community.

During Lent I read *The 40 Day Soul Fast: Your Journey to Authentic Living*, by Cindy Trimm (Destiny Image), with a group of women from my church—clergy and lay, at various places in our lives and faith. I was expecting something didactic and prescriptive, but Trimm's insights and her gentle, nonjudgmental style provided my group with the tools and courage we needed to challenge ourselves to be more ourselves.

Delores Carpenter and Nolan E. Williams Jr. have put together a hymnal that gathers the rich musical resources of the African-American church and honors the tradition's oral



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Barbara Brown Taylor Photo Credit: © Simon

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roots and its complex contemporary shifts. *African American Heritage Hymnal* (GIA Publications) includes so many widely familiar songs that it creates common space in a way few other hymnals do. Regardless of your cultural tradition, this hymnal should be added to your musical ministry toolbox.

CAROL HOWARD MERRITT

As Christians, we portray Jesus in stained glass, sermons, Sunday school, and sitcoms. *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America*, by Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey (University of North Carolina Press), takes a perceptive look at the ways we depict the Son of God in the context of our racial history. It has thoroughly changed my perspective.

The book of Acts says, "They put him to death by hanging him on a tree." In *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis), James Cone has meditated on those words and given us shuddering insight into the two powerful symbols of crucifixion and lynching. As our nation mourns the shootings of unarmed black men and boys, my mind turns to Cone's theology. He provides an unflinching look at history, an understanding of our present, and an enduring hope for liberation.

Some people practice social media, others study digital developments, and still others do church work; it's difficult to do all of those things well. Meredith Gould stands out for her unique per-

spective as someone with a Ph.D. in sociology who is a practitioner of social media and a person of faith. With *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways* (Liturgical Press), Gould has managed to preserve sacred traditions while embracing new ways of communicating.

Serene Jones's *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Westminster John Knox) is densely packed with wisdom, and I continually return to it in my preaching, writing, and teaching. Jones joins reflections on trauma recovery, John Calvin, and the Psalms to name the pain of the world. Her words ease the aching souls of those who work with victims of domestic violence, with people affected by war, or with those who suffer from terrorist attacks.

Bill McKibben dismantles many myths that drive our culture—and our churches. His book *Deep Economy* (St. Martin's Griffin) speaks against the "bigger is better" mentality and our longing for independence while drawing us into deeper relationships. His work reflects his tireless environmental activism. His hopeful vision has endless applications for faith communities.

BRADLEY N. HILL

On the basis of case studies of 400 churches, Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger assert that vibrant churches are simple



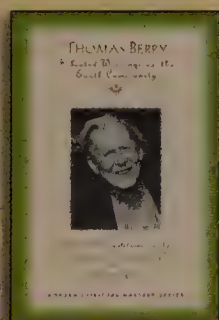
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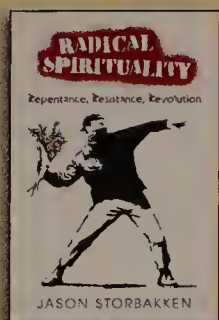
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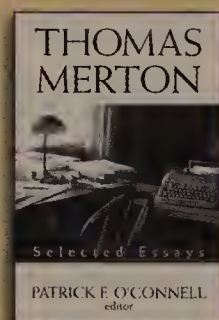
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churches that say yes to a clearly defined mission and no to everything else. Churches united around this process grow in mission and in power. Their book is *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (B & H Books).

Using the metaphor of construction, Constance Cherry's *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Baker Academic) provides a way to think about the elements of worship: foundation, rooms, load-bearing walls, doors, windows, and style. The driving question that pushes the reader deeper into the heart of worship is: How do we know whether our worship is pleasing to God?

For contemporary believers, argues Michael Frost, the metanarrative of Christianity has shifted from Christendom to exile. In *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Baker) he urges Christians to live dangerous lives of faith and churches to live as culturally relevant and biblically faithful communities.

Many current church practices are derived from pagan sources and not from the biblical practices of the early

church. The way out (or back, or forward), say Frank Viola and George Barna, authors of *Pagan Christianity? Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices* (Tyndale House), is the "living, breathing, dynamic . . . organic church"—that is, the house church.

The church is impoverished by its neglect of the Psalms. N.T. Wright's *A Case for the Psalms* (HarperOne) shows how Jesus' prayer book and hymnal transforms our worldview and imagination and sweeps us up into God's redemptive story.

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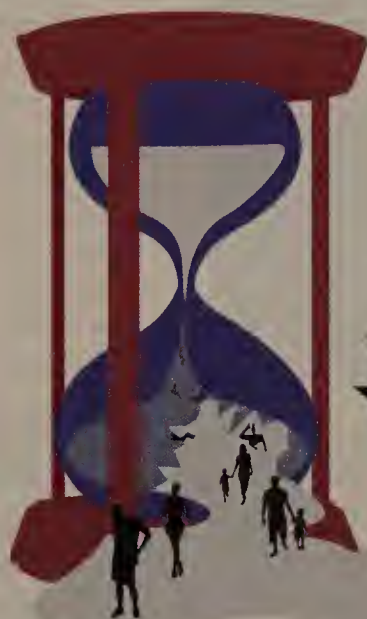
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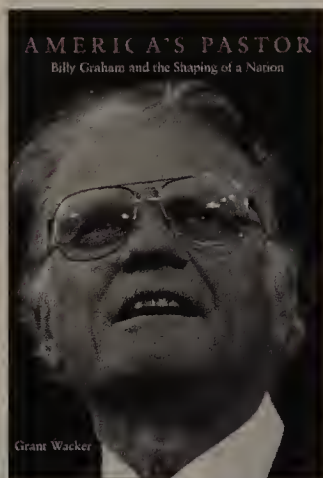
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FALL BOOKS

America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation

By Grant Wacker
Harvard University Press,
448 pp., \$27.95



Let it be said at once: this is the best book ever written about Billy Graham. I found this an absolutely captivating book and have read every word, including the footnotes.

What most obviously distinguishes *America's Pastor* is Grant Wacker's relentlessly analytical approach, combined with his determination to address each and every skeptical concern ever raised about the great evangelist. Although generous to a fault, this book engages issues that comparably generous studies of Graham usually avoid or leave to the side. One of the nation's most accomplished historians of American Protestantism, Wacker aims to clarify Graham's significance as a historical figure by taking into honest account every aspect of his public career. Biographical details abound in these pages, but always in the service of points that Wacker enumerates in helpful lists that remind the reader how different this book is from a biography or from a popular study in any genre.

A second, less obvious distinction of *America's Pastor* is even more important. Wacker provides abundant evidence for an interpretation of Graham's role in history that is quite different from the one Wacker himself defends. What is Wacker's view? And once that is understood, why does his book invite a different set of conclusions?

Wacker's argument comes in two parts. The first part he announces in italics: "*Graham displayed an uncanny ability to adopt trends in the wider culture and then use them for his evangelical and moral reform purposes.*" But this sentence does not do justice to the detail with which Wacker develops the claim. The salient trends and purposes were quite specific and deserve to be named. What Wacker actually demonstrates is that Graham was a genius at reinforcing and repackaging a variety of classically middle-American ideals and self-conceptions, then presenting them as imperfectly enacted by most people and

therefore in need of the extra inspiration that Graham's version of the gospel could provide.

"Accepting Christ" thus became a means of remaining within the confines of the inherited culture for which Norman Rockwell's paintings were an emblem while simultaneously promising to be better at it—better, that is, at living up to that culture's self-image. Practicing the Golden Rule, being faithful to one's spouse, eschewing pornography and homosexuality, steering clear of alcohol and drugs, being ready to lend a helping hand to those less well off, and supporting the essentials of the American economic and political order were not reliable marks of God's grace. But these behaviors were expected of those who had answered Graham's altar calls. Graham's selection of cultural trends to "adopt" and "use" reflected his core constituency: whites of moderate education from the small towns and small cities of the South and the Midwest who had been born into families at least nominally Protestant and usually in evangelical rather than confessional denominations.

Graham reached others, too, but he remained "unknown, little known, unappreciated, or disliked," Wacker notes accurately, "among great segments of the American population," especially non-Protestants, ethnic minorities, industrial workers, impoverished farm dwellers, big city inhabitants, secularists, academics, and even "a good many Protestants." The "America" of which Graham was the "pastor" was much less commodious than the America that came to recognize him as a celebrity, to appreciate his personal integrity in comparison to evangelists known for their sexual and financial transgressions, and to pay him the respect due to someone known to have the ear of presidents.

Wacker never states the second part of his argument in a single sentence, but he articulates it countless times as he analyzes one episode after another in Graham's career. Graham moved his followers in moderately progressive directions, diminishing their racism, their biblical literalism, their indifference to economic inequality, and their biases against non-Protestants, while enabling these followers to find their way theologically and politically between the right and the left.

Reviewed by David A. Hollinger, professor emeritus of American intellectual history at the University of California–Berkeley and author of After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History (Princeton University Press).

Graham did as much of this as could be reasonably expected, given the circumstances of his audience and the limits of his own skill set. Graham worried that if he got too far ahead, he would lose his following and thus his capacity to lead.

Graham was not a theologian or an intellectual, and he cannot be expected to have contributed in the ways that a better-educated preacher might have. He made some appalling mistakes: in a taped conversation in 1972, he accepted and even abetted President Nixon's guttersnipe anti-Semitism, and year after year he threw his support unmistakably to Republican candidates while disingenuously claiming to be politically neutral. But the conscientious Graham, Wacker's line of interpretation continues, later admitted to many of his failings and apologized sincerely for his most egregious errors.

Overall, this second part of Wacker's argument holds that Graham's chief historical significance is that he courageously moved millions of American Protestants away from obscurantist and reactionary postures and toward styles of evangelicalism that could function in a pluralistic society in which ecumenical Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and secularists were all to be respected for what they were rather than treated as potential converts or as passengers on an express train to hell. *America's Pastor* thus expresses a powerful disagreement with Graham's son, Franklin, who now supervises the legacy of the great evangelist and persistently associates that legacy with Sarah Palin and other figures who are decidedly to the political and theological right of the position that Wacker believes Billy Graham himself arrived at before weakening in old age.

Yet while developing this second part of his argument, Wacker calls ample attention to two realities that invite a different interpretation of Graham's historical significance. This alternative view is that Graham perpetuated more than challenged the obscurantist and reactionary postures that were common within his core constituency, and that he was capable of doing much more than he did to liberate his followers from those limitations.

One reality inviting this alternative conclusion is Graham's sharp intellect. Wacker convincingly depicts Graham as a smart and savvy man who could hold his own with any loquacious talk-show host and who proved to be a lively and resourceful interlocutor with academic audiences. Hence when Wacker finds "little evidence that Graham clearly understood" the basics of "biblical higher criticism or related critical methods taught in mainline Protestant seminaries," one can respond that such basics are not hard to learn and that anyone with Graham's mind could have informed himself about them if he cared to.

Graham "simply assumed that the Bible said what it meant and meant what it said," and he displayed no sense whatsoever of the "mystery, paradox, and the contingencies of interpretation" that have been vibrant components of faith for many Protestants, even those lacking the benefits of a seminary education. Graham "streamlined" the gospel, Wacker correctly observes, while affirming "traditional verities" and offering "a large but simplified message of salvation" that contained "a few exportable, stripped-down, time-tested principles."

Wacker struggles with the possibility that all this was "simple-minded." He dutifully resists this conclusion while admitting that Graham's preaching invariably achieved its appeal by avoiding hard questions and that it sometimes entailed "preposterous" representations of scripture. "The Bible says" this or that, Graham constantly intoned, invoking biblical authority for his own ideas without reflecting even minimally on the context in which statements ascribed to Moses or the apostle Paul or Jesus of Nazareth might have been composed.

Wacker credits Graham with thinking "seriously about things that mattered" instead of about theological niceties, as if such issues as the scope of providence, the nature of the church, the intended meaning of scriptural texts, and what was entailed in being "saved" did not matter. They did matter, and Wacker seems uncomfortable with his own implication that they did not. Innumerable clergy and Sunday school teachers, respecting the intellect of their audiences, have led the faithful



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through hermeneutic challenges that Graham had the capacity to understand and to explain. But “America’s pastor” blithely ignored these challenges from the beginning to the very end of his ministry.

Wacker also shows that most of Graham’s departures from extreme conservatism were concealed behind evasive language or did not become visible until well after Graham had achieved his authority, or both. This is the second reality that invites the alternative interpretation of Graham’s career. Wacker reveals this reality to have been equally prodigious in Graham’s theological pronouncements and in his political utterances.

“The Word of our God stands forever as an unchanging source of answers to all of life’s problems,” Graham proclaimed as late as 1988, long after Wacker credits him with having endorsed nonfundamentalist perspectives on many issues, including the epistemic status of the Bible (it had become “authoritative” rather than “inerrant”) and the end of history (he continued to discern in current events signs of the end but spoke in “broad terms such as wars and famines” rather than connecting highly specific events to the book of Revelation). When asked if he was a literalist, Graham liked to quip that nobody was—thereby dodging the question.

As to the Genesis story of creation, Graham acknowledged that the Bible was not a “scientific” book, but he did little to counteract the ignorant and antiscientific ideas about evolution that were rampant within his constituency. Wacker is sure-

ly correct to insist that Graham’s implacable fundamentalist critics noticed these distinctions, but Wacker is also correct to remind us that most of Graham’s followers were not interested in these distinctions and were happy with Graham’s “real-life answers to real-life questions.” Meanwhile, Graham gave a quiet pass to many ideas that could not possibly meet modern standards of cognitive plausibility.

Regarding racial issues, Wacker offers as painstaking an exploration of Graham’s vigorously contested record as we are likely ever to see. The takeaway message from his often agonized pages is that Graham did too little too late. At a time when his support for African Americans could have made a difference, Graham confined himself to integrating his rallies and prioritizing the changing of “hearts” rather than supporting the vigorous use of civil authority to fight racism. The same applies to Vietnam, which even Wacker calls “a stain on his record” because Graham came around so many years after he might have made a difference.

Wacker emphasizes Graham’s willingness after 1974 to treat the diminution of poverty, inequality, and other social injustices as a Christian obligation, but here Graham and his cohort of evangelicals were merely falling into line at long last with an outlook the hated ecumenical Protestants had advanced for several generations. Graham never pulled back from his early-career assertion that the Bible declared same-sex relationships to be so sinful that those guilty of this sin must “repent and

change if they wished to be welcomed into the church,” but Wacker appears relieved that the mature Graham came to describe this sin as “just one sin among others” and that in 1997 he welcomed all members of a San Francisco audience “whatever your sexual orientation.”

So this is the enlightened Graham that *America’s Pastor* asks us to recognize as the historic figure who “reshaped the waterways of American Protestantism.” Graham’s progressive steps, such as they were, risked his standing only with the most extreme conservatives in politics and religion, while many of his ecumenical contemporaries risked much more, traveling way beyond their constituencies and often paying a terrible price within their own churches for their prophetic stances.

By not speaking out earlier and more forcefully, Graham led a life of missed opportunities. He cannot be absolved of responsibility for what his son and other religiously and politically reactionary voices are doing with the legacy. The obstacles the elder Graham left against these uses of his name are flimsy. Billy Graham was an enabler, facilitating the very strands in American evangelical culture from which Wacker tries to distance him.

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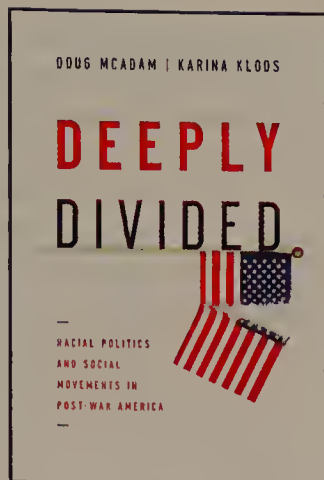
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**Deeply Divided:
Racial Politics and
Social Movements
in Post-War America**
By Doug McAdam and Karina Kloos
Oxford University Press,
408 pp., \$29.95



Politics have always been dirty. For every triumph of cooperation and principle, there are dozens of instances of division, mudslinging, and vitriol. All students of history understand this fact.

It seems, though, that in recent years American politics have taken a particularly dark and nasty turn. Jason Chaffetz, a freshman Republican member of Congress from Utah, publicly vowed that he and a group of colleagues would “take the government down” if congressional leaders did not acquiesce to their demands, and months later he won reelection with 76 percent of the vote. A bipartisan bill to establish a task force to develop a plan to address the nation’s deficit failed to pass the U.S. Senate because eight original Republican cosponsors of the legislation voted against their own bill upon learning that President Obama was in support of the measure. Midway through his second term in office, Obama faces a nation in which 25 percent of the population believe that his presidency is illegitimate because, they maintain, he was not born in America, 17 percent hold that he is a practicing Muslim, and according to one poll—this is not a joke—10 percent believe he is the Antichrist. Is this really politics, even dirty politics, as usual?

Doug McAdam, a professor of sociology at Stanford University, and Karina Kloos, an activist and scholar of social movements, think not. In *Deeply Divided*, the authors argue that contemporary American politics have taken an extreme turn that has ground previously functioning political processes to a halt, all but eliminated bipartisanship and compromise, and helped to create the greatest inequality in wealth that the United States has seen since the 1920s. They write, “The events of the past six years—serial budget crises, government shut-down, willful sabotage of presidential appointments, etc.—have told us all we need to know about escalating paralysis and government dysfunction.” The ten Congresses between 1948 and 1968 averaged almost 1,400 pieces of legislation enacted in each two-year period. By comparison, the most recent Congress enacted a grand total of 284 pieces of legislation in the same amount of time. Can we be surprised that one in three Americans now identify “government/Congress/politicians” as the nation’s most pressing problem?

McAdam and Kloos tell the story of how we reached this distressing state. Starting with the example of the post-World War II United States, the authors draw a vivid picture of just how different American politics used to be. Over the course of Franklin Roosevelt’s four decisive presidential election victories—the last one with 98 percent of the electoral vote—most opponents of his social welfare programs retired, modi-

fied their views, or were voted out of office. By the end of the war, there was a widespread consensus in both political parties that government is the primary instrument for economic growth and justice. In addition, as the nation emerged from the war against Nazi Germany and its ideology of a master race, “policy makers across a broad array of institutional arenas took seriously the need to broaden access to the American dream.”

By the time the 1960s rolled around, political scientists were writing about “the triumph of the center” and positing that modern American democratic structures, by their very nature, produce a consensus that converges on moderate political positions. There seemed to be little reason to question the theory. Contemporary accounts of the 1960 presidential election—with the victory of a young, first-term senator from Massachusetts over a two-term sitting vice president—often portrayed it as a political watershed, signaling the ascendance of a new generation over the old political guard. But John Kennedy and Richard Nixon were both pragmatic moderates with similar positions on the critical issues of the day. Both “advocated civil rights reform, aggressive action to counter Soviet threats wherever they appeared in the world and a continued active role for the federal government in countering disadvantage and inequities.” In 1960, the difference between Democrats and Republicans was often a matter more of style than of substance. Indeed, numerous Republicans in Congress possessed more liberal voting records than did their Democratic counterparts.

In the immediate aftermath of Kennedy’s assassination in 1963, differences between the parties seemed to shrink even further. In his first two years as president, Lyndon Johnson was able to steer a stunning array of sweeping legislation through Congress—not merely the 1964 Civil Rights Act but also bills establishing Medicaid and Medicare, protecting the environment, supporting the arts, and promoting rural development and urban renewal. To be sure, racism and poverty were far from dead, but political opponents were able to unite behind the ideals of greater equality and justice and to pass substantive legislation to advance these principles. Moreover, there was a mainstream perception that the nation was building to a better future together. In 1964, the top income tax rate for the highest-earning Americans was almost 90 percent, the income disparity between wealthy and poor Americans was among the smallest on record, and almost 80 percent of Americans said they trusted the government “just about always” or “most of the time.”

How times have changed. Today the highest income tax rate is just under 40 percent (and complaints that it is too high fill mainstream Republican and Tea Party political discourse), disparity of wealth is twice the level in 1964, and barely 20 percent of Americans say that they trust their government. Divisions are so deep between political parties that even the simplest of proposals creates intractable divisions in Washington. What happened?

Reviewed by Timothy Renick, professor of religious studies at Georgia State University in Atlanta, where he is also vice provost and vice president.

McAdam and Kloos do not believe the change is democratically based—that is, it is not due to a fundamental shift in the beliefs of the U.S. populace. As they explain, “The deep partisan divide that characterizes today’s Congress is typically *not* mirrored in the general public. Quite the opposite: the general public has remained largely centrist in their views, while the parties—especially the GOP—and their candidates have been pushed off center.”


Put simply, politicians are no longer obligated to serve the political center the way they once were. Instead, their primary allegiance is often to a vocal group mobilized around a specific cause: “Over the past half century social movements have increasingly challenged, and occasionally supplanted, parties as the dominant mobilizing logic and organizing vehicle of American politics.” Elections increasingly hinge on politicians from both parties gaining and keeping the support of a passionate fringe rather than the “median voter.” As a result, the centrist and pragmatic outlook that characterized politicians of the postwar generation has largely disappeared.


The authors argue that a major cause of the marginalization of the political center was ironically the push for greater democracy in party politics. The turning point was the tumultuous Democratic primary season of 1968. In March of that year, just weeks after almost losing the New Hampshire pri-

mary to anti-Vietnam War candidate Eugene McCarthy, President Johnson stunned the nation by announcing that he would not seek reelection. Robert Kennedy then entered the race, winning primaries in several states and becoming the front-runner for the Democratic nomination before his assassination on the evening of his victory in the California primary. Meanwhile, McCarthy ran in every primary, winning Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Oregon, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Illinois. In 1968, though, primary results were not binding on the delegates to the Democratic Convention, who were mostly long-term state party officials and establishment Democrats.

In the summer of 1968, the candidate ultimately selected by the delegates at the Democratic Convention in Chicago was not McCarthy but Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who had not participated in a single primary. The “fix was in,” according to McCarthy supporters and other antiwar Democrats. The protests and violence that erupted in Chicago during the convention not only doomed Humphrey’s chances of winning the presidency in November but also set in motion a series of reforms that would thereafter give primary voters binding power over the delegates sent to both parties’ political conventions.

This move toward populism brought many new voices into mainstream politics. The antiwar faction behind George





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McGovern would win the Democratic nomination for their candidate in 1972 but badly lose the general election. The religious right first became a significant factor in American presidential politics in 1976, and the candidate who mobilized its passion was the born-again governor of Georgia, Jimmy Carter. Though the highly public support for Carter by televangelists such as Pat Robertson was short-lived—by 1980 they were throwing their support behind Carter's far more socially conservative Republican opponent, Ronald Reagan, swinging the South to Reagan in the process—a new model for securing a party's nomination was becoming evident. The presidential candidates who were able to survive their parties' grueling gauntlet of primaries, where candidates are many and voters are often few, were those who tapped into the passions of ideological factions within their parties.

An unforeseen consequence of the new nominating rules was thus their impact on the pragmatic, moderate center of the American political spectrum. McAdam and Kloos explain that because the "nominating process . . . favors small numbers of committed activists, the real action is taking part at the ideological edges of the system, effectively marginalizing the great majority of Americans who occupy the moderate center of the political continuum." This so-called tyranny of the primary not only shapes presidential politics; it dominates congressional and state legislative elections, where voter turnout is much smaller and the voices of the passionate few can hold even greater sway.

Other factors have accelerated the shift of American politics away from the center. Once ideologically driven politicians reach their statehouses, they must hold on to the support of the issue-driven voters who were responsible for their election. This has spurred an epidemic of radical gerrymandering at the state level—a legally questionable practice that has gone largely unchecked by the courts. In Georgia, the 11th Congressional District now extends from Atlanta to Savannah 248 miles away. In North Carolina, the 12th Congressional District, only a few miles wide in most places, reaches 140 miles from Charlotte in the south to Durham in the north. By concentrating all of the opposition party's supporters into a few districts and conceding defeat in these districts, the ruling party can significantly increase the number of statewide districts in which it holds the majority.

According to McAdam and Kloos, gerrymandering has had a profound but underappreciated role in undermining the competitiveness of our political system. As recently as 1992, 103 of 435 congressional districts were competitive—meaning that the number of Democratic and Republican voters in the district were within five percentage points of each other. Today, that number is down to 35. As the authors put it, "The great majority of Americans now exercise little electoral voice when it comes to those who represent them in the House." Moreover, with the vast majority of districts dominated by voters from a single

party, there is little incentive for and much risk in bipartisan compromise. For ideologues there is no honor in the middle ground.

McAdam and Kloos maintain that the electoral college exacerbates these problems. In the 2012 presidential election, there were only six battleground states—that is, states in which the margin of victory for either candidate was 5 percent or less: Colorado, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. The mean margin of victory in the other 44 states was a whopping 19 percent. This means that if you are a Republican voter in New York or a Democrat voter in Louisiana, you might as well sit out the presidential election. Your voice will make no difference in the results. How do we get more Americans to engage with politics when we have created so many ways to prevent their voices from having any meaning?

In their compelling and detailed account of the circumstances that have fostered the vitriolic, dysfunctional system that now defines American politics, McAdam and Kloos have less to say about what can be done to get us out of this predicament. In the volume's closing chapter, they argue that "the key . . . to gaining any kind of meaningful traction on the substantive economic and political issues that divide us must come from efforts to restore and revitalize our democratic ideals and practices." They suggest such steps as eliminating the electoral college and electing the president by popular vote; creating open primaries in which candidates from all parties compete against one another, with the top two finishers facing off in the general election; removing the responsibility for redistricting from legislative and other political bodies; and even making voting mandatory for all eligible Americans in order to increase turnout and dampen the power of political extremes. Because special-interest campaign dollars often trump majority opinion—as with the National Rifle Association's ability to counter overwhelming popular support for greater gun control—the authors also advocate comprehensive campaign finance reform.

Of course, the path to enacting such measures and the impacts that these steps would have remain unclear. What is clear is that the simplest way to ensure the perpetuation of the current dysfunctional state of American politics is for mainstream Americans to continue to approach politics with apathy and resignation.



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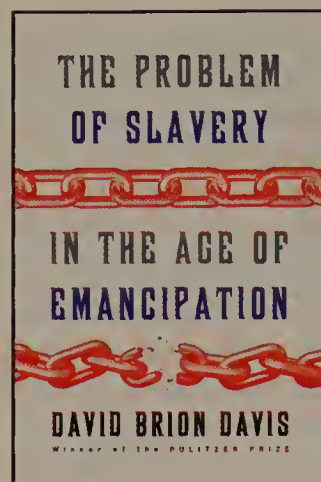
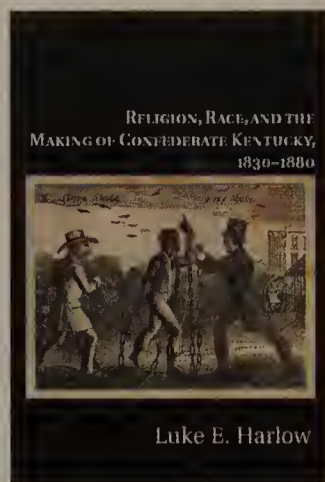
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**Religion, Race,
and the Making of
Confederate Kentucky,
1830–1880**

By Luke E. Harlow
Cambridge University Press,
253 pp. \$90.00

**The Problem of Slavery in
the Age of Emancipation**

By David Brion Davis
Knopf, 448 pp., \$30.00



During the tumultuous 1860s, N. G. Markham did his best to live a Christian life. Away from his Michigan home, he spent his days and nights in Tennessee as a soldier in the Union army. He wrote frequently to his wife, Eunice, of his camp experiences, battlefield struggles, and the faith he tried to maintain. “We have the funniest Sundays I ever saw,” he reported in September 1862. “Some are writing, some singing, some reading their testaments, some cleaning their guns, and some are asleep and some are cursing and swearing.”

More than a year later, both the war and Markham had changed. The Emancipation Proclamation had transformed the “war for the Union” into a war for universal abolition, and the fighting had become more ferocious on all sides. Markham was glad to have a wife who prayed for him. “I have faith to believe that your prayers will be answered,” he wrote. “Keep on praying for it is good to feel when we are in danger.”

When it came to the lives of African Americans and the end of slavery, however, he neither offered prayer nor encouraged anyone else to pray. “I am not half so much of an abolitionist as I was before I came here,” Markham explained in the same letter. “The free niggers here [are] the most lazy lot of fellows that I ever saw. I would not turn my hand over to see the whole of them free.”

One year later, Markham once again reflected on how different his life had become. He now worked alongside free black men in his military company. At first he wanted nothing to do with a “nigger regiment.” As an enlistee, however, Markham didn’t get to make those kinds of choices. When black men entered his company, he had two options. He could lift hands with them or he could be court-martialed. So he worked with them, and eventually he began spending some of his social time with them. “I am learning a Negro here in our Company to read,” he wrote to Eunice. “He learns very fast.” Three months later, Markham died of a camp disease.

As a white Christian living and dying in the great moment of emancipation, Markham both roared and reflected on the roller coaster of his times. He longed for the Lord’s favor and protection, and he viewed African Americans in the aggregate, rather than as individuals. At one point he deemed them unworthy of human or heavenly aid. Even when he taught a black man to read, Markham didn’t mention the man’s name or anything else about him. At least in the letter, the man was simply “a Negro here in our Company.”

Scholars have spent decades trying to understand the N. G.

Markhams of the United States. How could northern whites, who seemed to care so little for African Americans, fight, kill, and die for mass emancipation? How did these whites come to support a limited set of rights for blacks during the era of Reconstruction, but then abandon them in the 1870s and do little to stop the racial violence of the 1880s and beyond?

Two new books, one from a junior scholar and the other from a

senior one, shed important new light on these questions. Luke E. Harlow’s *Religion, Race, and the Making of Confederate Kentucky* uses the anomaly of Kentucky to explain the much broader phenomenon of white Christian racism and its attachment to political conservatism. Harlow begins with a problem: How did a slaveholding state remain within the Union during the war but then join the Confederacy theologically after its defeat? For Harlow, the answer rests in the tangled webs of religion, slavery, and race.

Through close readings of sermons, denominational newspapers, treatises, and tracts, Harlow shows that before the Civil War, white Kentuckians waged an intense battle over slavery and abolition. Three camps emerged. The smallest pushed for immediate emancipation; the largest suggested gradual emancipation coupled with colonization, or sending blacks to live outside the United States; a third group found no problem with slavery and wished it to continue. An uneasy coalition emerged among gradualists and proslavery Kentuckians, and they aligned both in religious denominations and in the state’s politics. At the center of this alliance was the belief that immediate abolition was a Christian heresy that had the power to disrupt the state’s and the nation’s political stability.

White Kentuckians split their loyalties when the war came, but the state remained within the Union. During the first year of the conflict, leading white Christians endorsed the Union, in large part because of their commitment to political stability. Emancipation, however, drastically altered the playing field. The possibility of gradual abolition was nullified. Emancipation had not only come swiftly, it had brought with it the arming of black men in the Union military. This was horrifying to many white Christians, who viewed it as the triumph of “Northern Apostasy.” Only a “Satanic School” of politicians and preachers could have concocted such a wicked plan, claimed one leading voice of Kentucky Presbyterianism.

When the war ended and emancipation became the law of the land, white Kentuckians shifted their loyalties to the Confederacy, which lived on as an ethos even though it was dead as a nation-state. In Harlow’s telling, the Confederacy

Reviewed by Edward J. Blum, who teaches American history at San Diego State University and is coauthor (with Paul Harvey) of The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America.

was also a theology that wove together religion, politics, and race. The tenets of this racial religion were quite simple: white supremacy was godly; any interference with it, political or religious, was heretical and therefore should be attacked politically and religiously. Confederate Kentucky was made by this racial religion.

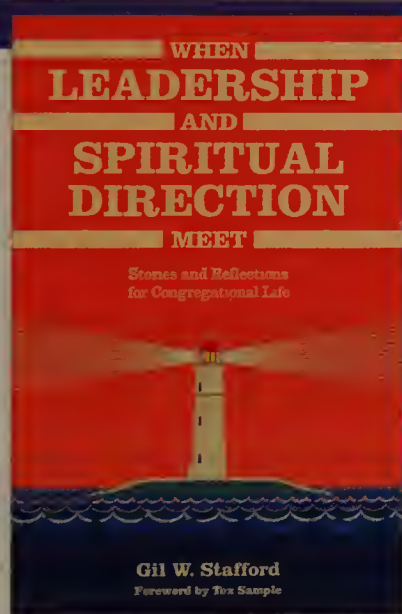
While Harlow zeroes in on slavery, emancipation, and race in a single state, David Brion Davis zooms out to provide a panorama of the broad Atlantic world. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* is the final installment of Davis's trilogy on slavery in Western culture. The first two books analyzed the problem of slavery in the West from the age of antiquity to the convulsions of 18th-century revolutions. This new volume explores how emancipation overcame slavery from the Haitian Revolution to the American Civil War. The fundamental problem, according to Davis, was articulated by Thomas Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*: "What further is to be done with these people?"

The Haitian Revolution not only began the age of emancipation, it haunted it. Throughout the Atlantic world, political leaders feared what would happen after slavery. They read reports of murder and mayhem in Haiti and feared that emancipation would unleash barbaric and angry blacks who would seize whites' lands and bodies. Slaveholders attempted to domesticate slaves as they had cattle and horses, but they could never achieve it to their satisfaction. The slaveholders were

never able to dehumanize humans. This combination—the horrors of Haiti and the failure to create perfectly compliant slaves—left white leaders searching for a solution.

For most white leaders, the colonization of free blacks was the answer, at least rhetorically. From Jefferson to Lincoln, many politicians considered it the necessary addendum to emancipation, and some African Americans volunteered to leave the United States. Colonization schemes were diverse not only in their plans, but also in their underlying ideologies. Some proponents observed commercial possibilities; others viewed colonization as another Exodus. After its founding in 1820, Liberia became the focal point for hopes that colonization could solve the problem of emancipation in the age of slavery. In all cases, however, colonization became fraught with the same problems of colonial settlement that marked other territories, including the United States of the same era.

The heroes of *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* are free blacks, whose presence in the western American territories caused the Civil War and made mass emancipation possible. Free blacks recognized that their achievements and actions were being judged and that they needed to lead virtuous lives to convince white Americans to at least nominally support their freedom. According to Davis, they convinced an important group of whites that plans for colonization were an expression of white supremacy.



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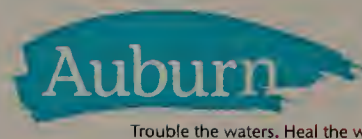
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Davis and Harlow add considerably to scholarly thinking about slavery, emancipation, politics, race, and religion. They force us to see how these problems were tied together and that to address one of them was to somehow address them all.

But they are focused mostly on scribblers and speakers. Both Harlow and Davis emphasize 19th-century problems as ideological ones, and neither looks closely at the nitty-gritty of life—which is troubling, especially in the case of Davis's book. By emphasizing free blacks as the central characters of the saga, Davis privileges those who achieved broader freedom and the capacity to write or to have their words recorded for

posterity. The more than 3 million Americans who remained in bondage were crucial as well, but because they largely failed to leave written accounts of their ideas, they are largely written out of this account.

Moreover, by emphasizing the ideological, Harlow and Davis fail to reckon with the problems of race and religion that go beyond what people say or write. What people do and fail to do, what they own and fail to own, and what they share and fail to share offer windows into the past as well. This is certainly the case with Markham. His Christian individualism and his statements against free blacks fit within the Christian white supremacist ideology of his age. But what was he doing reading with an African American man, a fellow soldier in his company? If we look between the lines, we may see two men sharing Bibles as they did rifles. We may feel handshakes after a church service or glimpse looks of gratitude in the midst of battle. The powers of white supremacy have been and are great. But they have never been total, even in the life of N. G. Markham.

If recent events in Ferguson, Missouri, and elsewhere have taught us little else, it is that the United States is anything but finished with its struggles over race. The legacies of slavery are still with us, and they include the assumption that whiteness is somehow close to godliness. Works like Harlow's and Davis's give us food for thought at a time when we need more sustenance to keep fighting and hoping that God will make right, for might has failed to do so.



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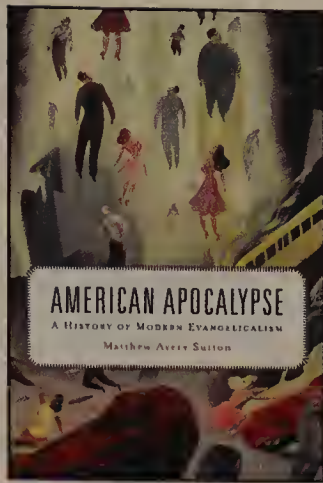
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American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism

By Matthew Avery Sutton
Harvard University Press,
480 pp., \$35.00



Why do most white evangelicals vote Republican? How has this affected Republican politics? In *American Apocalypse*, Matthew Sutton, author of a prize-winning biography of Aimee Semple McPherson, gives us our first good account of how and why evangelical political views developed the way they did. Three elements were crucial—premillennial eschatology, World War I, and the Puritan heritage. Oh, and a fourth: white evangelicals were not African American.

The book opens by describing a new way of reading the Bible called dispensational premillennialism, which became popular in the late 19th century. Leaders of this movement came primarily from the two holiness traditions—Wesleyan holiness and its Pentecostal offspring, and Keswick (Higher Life) holiness, a British variant. Sutton calls these folks “radical evangelicals,” and for good reason. Many of their ideas and attitudes put them outside the norms of conservative middle-class Protestantism.

Sutton notes that dispensationalism was anything but conservative. In an era when most Christians thought the world was getting better, dispensationalism taught that it was getting worse. The Bible predicted that unprecedented natural disasters, accelerating wickedness, global wars, social chaos, apostasy of churches, Jewish reconstitution of Israel in Palestine, and a new European empire ruled by the Antichrist would finally culminate in the rapture, when true Christians would supernaturally rise to meet Christ in the air. Then, after a seven-year period of totalitarian oppression and world conflict, Christ would return, defeat the Antichrist in the earth-shaking battle of Armageddon, and inaugurate the millennium.

It is startling to realize that premillennialists were making these predictions in the 1870s before the development of liberal theology, two world wars, global economic crises, the rise of totalitarian states, creation of the nation of Israel, a nuclear arms race, the threat of environmental catastrophe, and rapid social change. These developments understandably convinced premillennialists that they were right. Sutton argues that this gave them absolute certainty that they alone were correctly interpreting the Bible.

Sutton also shows that it energized them to strenuous action. Their key Bible verse here was Jesus’ injunction to “occupy till I come.” In the 19th century this meant aggressive evangelizing at home and abroad so that as many as possible could be saved from the suffering and destruction of the seven-year tribulation following the rapture. To accomplish this they built a large network of independent missionary organizations and Bible institutes.

But they did not just evangelize. They also kept watch on how

contemporary events were fulfilling prophecy, and this naturally led them to comment on political developments. Because their premillennialism and independent organizations placed them outside the mainstream of middle-class Protestantism, they felt no particular compunction to align with conservative middle-class politics. So while mainstream Protestants in the late 19th century urged the government to crack down on unions, premillennialists were as likely to side with workers and rain invective on rapacious capitalists. At the turn of the century many premillennialists made common cause with Progressive campaigns against political corruption, urban vice, saloons, and corporate monopolies. And when the United States finally entered World War I, premillennialists tended to be skeptical about American war aims; some were even pacifists.

But the war and its aftermath, Sutton argues, proved to be “the central pivot” for the premillennial movement. Liberal church leaders and premillennialists accused each other of being unpatriotic, and in the process premillennialists shed their skepticism about America. They adopted the old Puritan view that God had chosen America for a special destiny. Meanwhile contemporary events—the shocking devastation of the war, the new communist dictatorship in Russia, the rebellion against Victorian manners and morals (think flappers and risqué Hollywood movies), and the victory of theological liberals in the fundamentalist-modernist controversies convinced premillennialists that they were living in the end times.

The political impact was that premillennialists (now often called fundamentalists) stepped up their criticism of moral decline and aligned themselves with the Republican Party. Unionized workers all of a sudden looked like Bolsheviks, so premillennialists began defending corporations and the wealthy. They adopted another Puritan conviction—that government should regulate morality—and staunchly defended Prohibition. Two presidential elections cemented them to the GOP. The Democratic candidate in 1928, Al Smith, was a Catholic who favored repeal of Prohibition. And the Democratic candidate in 1932, Franklin Roosevelt, favored not only repeal but also aggressive government intervention in the economy. In the era of Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin, premillennialists thought Roosevelt was a dictator-in-the-making and his New Deal the beginning of American socialism.

Premillennialists emerged from World War II into the cold war era with a new name—evangelicals—and with new organizations and an expanded program for evangelism and social action. Key leaders included Boston minister Harold Ockenga, theologian Carl F. H. Henry, and editor L. Nelson Bell and his son-in-law Billy Graham. Oilman J. Howard Pew, a fervent opponent of the New Deal, was a key benefactor. Together they established the National Association of Evangelicals, *Christianity Today* magazine, and Fuller Theological Seminary. They continued to evangelize, but now for the purpose of “revival.” By this they meant a religious awakening and moral reformation that would renew the national character. They also advocated for change in the nation’s political, moral, and intel-

Reviewed by Michael S. Hamilton, who teaches American history at Seattle Pacific University.

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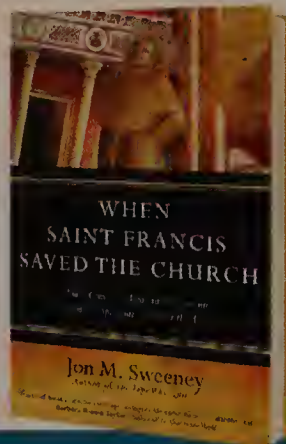
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lectual direction. They forged a political ideology that made limited government, free enterprise, and religious freedom its first principles. They preached liberty in economic matters but government suppression of immorality. In foreign policy they championed interventionist unilateralism. "Occupy till I come" became "occupy the nation till I come."

Premillennialism could thus be adapted to a variety of political frameworks. Sutton also demonstrates its adaptability by tracing the very different path of African-American premillennialism. Black premillennialists commonly believed that God's faithful end-times remnant would be African, that America was the seat of the Antichrist, and that African Americans were already living in the tribulation (think Mississippi in 1964). They often viewed white racism as a sign of the end times and government protection of their civil rights as the liberating hand of God. White evangelicals, by contrast, did little to roll back the practices or effects of racism. Most opposed the civil rights movement, fearing that it was communist-led and dangerously expanded the reach of the federal government.

By this time white premillennialists, having transitioned from radical evangelicals to fundamentalists to new evangelicals, had become right-wing Republicans. They now believed, Sutton tells us, that "the destiny of the nation . . . was in their hands." Their political activity, which started out as commentary and at mid-century became advocacy, finally in the 1970s became mobilization when they were recruited and organized by the conservative wing of the GOP. This gave us the religious right and the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush.

It also transformed the American political climate. Sutton argues that evangelicals' apocalyptic theology gave their politics "the urgency, the absolute morals, the passion to right the world's wrongs, and the refusal to compromise" that now defines right-wing politics. But of course influence runs in both directions. Evangelicalism has given the Republican Party a new moralistic absolutism, while the right wing of the Republican Party has given evangelicalism a new hardness of heart. Time will tell if these are steps toward revival or toward apocalypse.

The Deepest Human Life: An Introduction to Philosophy for Everyone

By Scott Samuelson
University of Chicago Press,
240 pp., \$22.50

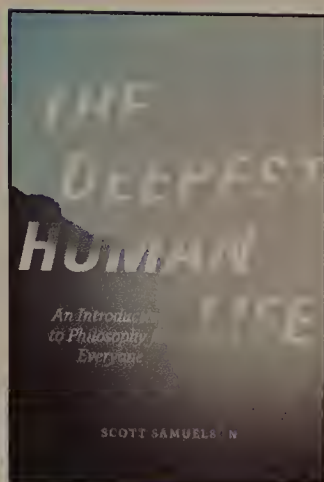
The word *philosophy* is derived from the Greek for love of wisdom—not knowledge, mind you, but wisdom. It is cliché to moan that academic philosophy is taken up with abstruse and perhaps insoluble puzzles—secular versions of wondering how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Socrates famously said that the unexamined life is not worth living. Perhaps the examined life is not worth it either. Why not study something practical instead of spinning your wheels on pseudo problems, as the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein put it? That is the suggestion philosopher Peter Unger drives toward in his recently published cannonade, *Empty Ideas*.

The Deepest Human Life is an elegantly written, impassioned, and sometimes disjointed plea on behalf of philosophy. Author Scott Samuelson, a philosophy professor at Kirkwood Community College in Iowa City, invokes poets, novelists, and theologians to defend the dialectical process that Socrates imparted, obliquely arguing that no matter who you are or what you are doing, self-examination will enrich your world and nurture “the deepest human life.”

Seneca, one of the many thinkers to appear in these pages, taught, “He who studies with a philosopher should take home with him some good thing every day. He should daily return home a sounder man, or on the way to becoming sounder.” If this does not happen, if the pupil only accumulates some knowledge or perhaps becomes an expert in intellectual jujitsu, he is wasting his time. Concurring with Seneca, Samuelson writes, “All ideas under philosophical discussion, in the end, must be judged on their ability to help us live well.” For Samuelson, philosophical inquiry—intellectually probing beneath the floorboards of our basic assumptions—will help us live better lives by augmenting our sense of meaning.

The Deepest Human Life would be

Reviewed by Gordon Marino, professor of philosophy and director of the Hong Kierkegaard Library at St. Olaf College and editor of The Quotable Kierkegaard (Princeton University Press).



an excellent companion volume for anyone interested in a study of philosophy's greatest hits. It opens with a scintillating spate of pages on Plato's *Euthyphro* and *Apology*. As Samuelson reads these classic texts, the basic question the gadfly of Athens let loose was: Do you worship goodness or power?

Many professors claim to learn from their students while inwardly denying the claim. But the enchanting Samuelson takes us along to class with him in these lively pages. Unlike other members of the philosophers' guild, he seldom serves up an abstraction without an accompanying concrete example culled from in-class comments and student papers.

For instance, when discussing Immanuel Kant's moral theory, Samuelson informs us that for Kant, consequences are of no moral consequence. We cannot control what happens in the world. On the plane of right and wrong, it is only our intentions that matter. Having delivered this riff, Samuelson recalls a time when one of his students took him aside and asked, “with startling passion, ‘Is it true what Kant says? Is it true . . . that the consequences of an action are irrelevant?’” We then read that this ardent student was the mother of a young boy who died in an operation she had reluctantly agreed to—an operation that might have been required because of an injury inflicted by the boy's abusive father, to whom she was married.

One of Samuelson's strongest chapters is on the Stoics, those porch-sitting cogitators to whom St. Paul brought the



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good news of Christianity. The Stoics took Socrates for their lodestar and included the likes of Epictetus, Cato, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius. They stressed the use of reason for discernment and bringing one's life into harmony with the grand logic of the universe. Stoicism was all about achieving inner peace in a topsy-turvy political world. It was philosophy as therapy. Through study and practice, students of this austere school aimed at gaining control over their desires, emotions, and expectations. They also reasoned that if people are unable to take their own lives, they are prisoners in this world. So one of the cardinal lessons of stoicism was that freedom requires the ability to commit suicide.

After outlining the major points of the Stoic thinkers, Samuelson enumerates some concrete techniques for those who might be interested in becoming Stoics: study, meditation in the morning, starting small, having a sense of humor, and reviewing the day at bedtime.

One of the many virtues of this study is that it not only draws from Eastern and Western thinkers, it brings sages from various traditions into dialogue with one another. Samuelson, who seems to have read just about everyone, wheels the Sunni mystic Al-Ghazali into position to help us grasp the significance of Descartes's search for certainty in his *Meditations*. He seats Zen Buddhists across the table from Pascal to illuminate Pascal's famous statement, "The sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room."

Read: does not know how to resist the impulse to text, tweet, or jump on Facebook.

What of the relationship between Athens and Jerusalem, between faith and reason? As a youngster growing up in the Midwest, Samuelson attended church every Sunday. The population of his hometown was dwindling, so he was introduced to the faith in a mixed Presbyterian and Methodist congregation. He confides that in this church and in the community around it he observed hypocrisies and contradictions but concludes, "When I think about religious institutions and all their foolishness, or of philosophy classes, for that matter, and all theirs, I have nothing but gratitude." Samuelson adds, "They kept us in contact with the triggers of the spirit"—fires capable of igniting a sense of awe that lifts you out of time, transfiguring the world and perhaps even your feelings about the guy who cut you off in traffic. According to this true believer, the unexamined life is a life devoid of meaning, and the ability to find questions where others locate only tame certainties is an ability sure to magnify your sense that life is meaningful and even sacred.

A philosopher poet like Kierkegaard would furrow his brow at the fact that this self-proclaimed "practical mystic" has transformed the experience of awe into a god term. For Kierkegaard, puzzlement is only a part of the picture. On his reckoning, it is only by translating our ethico-religious ideas into the medium of action that we can begin to own and understand them.

There are, in short, more decisive moments in life than being spellbound by questions such as: Why is there something rather than nothing? And yet this compelling story of philosophy nudges the reader toward the conviction that a sense of awe, which Samuelson lionizes and invites, will transform more than our ways of thinking.



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David: The Divided Heart

By David Wolpe

Yale University Press, 176 pp.,
\$25.00



There is at present a stream of good and interesting books on the Hebrew Bible's King David, written by first-rate scholars. These books variously address historical and sociological questions concerning the rise of the monarchy in ancient Israel, but they tend to find most interesting the artistic offer of the narrative presentation. In his welcome, accessible sketch of David, Rabbi David Wolpe of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles takes into account this stream of critical study, but goes his own inventive way in his articulation.

When I first received Wolpe's book, I gave it a quick read. It seemed to me simply a thoughtful retelling of the David narrative, and I wondered how I would find enough to say for a review. But then I remembered that any rabbinic offering is entitled to a slow read, because the way of textual commentary that is readily associated with a rabbinic presentation is patient; with great attention to detail, it savors words and teases with images and analogues. As a result of my slow read, I have come to great appreciation of the book in its deceptive simplicity, and I have learned more about David and a great deal about reading texts carefully.

Wolpe's book is a thoughtful, reflective exploration of the various roles in which David is cast in the narrative. In his account of the young David, Wolpe considers the fact that "God instructs Samuel to lie" in the process of anointing David to be a harbinger of the guile that is to come in the narrative that follows. He sees that David "makes things new," "conjuring solutions and possibilities from the void." David cleverly defeats Goliath (whose sword is the "ancient analogue of Babe Ruth's bat"), manages a flight from Saul to power, and shifts deftly from nomadic existence to envision a permanent temple. It is such newness that marks him as a man of God.

As lover and husband, David exhibits a divided heart. But, Wolpe writes, "to

speak of a conflicted heart is simply to speak of a human heart":

A poet, a musician, a multiply married man, he understood the tropes and obligations of attachment, and with his wives as with his children, as we shall see, the closeness to others determined his destiny even as it divided his heart.

In his discussion of David as fugitive, Wolpe traces David alongside Jonathan, face-to-face with Saul, and seemingly trapped beyond escape with the Philistines. Wolpe judges of these "cliffhanger" narratives: "What none of these commentators doubted was that the human events were reflective of a divine plan—Saul had to die so that David could become king." But that divine resolve is firmly situated in sordid human company: "We can only imagine the collection of loyalists, bandits, ruffians, and perhaps ecstasies who have collected around this charismatic man."

When this David becomes king, Wolpe notes, many of his enemies are conveniently eliminated, while he maintains his "plausible deniability":

For some readers the whiff of convenience has become the stench of conspiracy. . . . The Tanach goes to a great deal of trouble to insist that David was blameless. . . . Still, the

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Reviewed by Walter Brueggemann, whose most recent book is From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms (Westminster John Knox).



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attempt to turn David into a Machiavellian thoroughbred does violence to the complexity of his character. There are shades of David's soul we have not yet seen.

David the king is a model of both "equanimity and ruthlessness."

But things soon fall apart for the king, who becomes a sinner. David remains in the city in the season of war. "Perhaps he wants to run his good fortune through his fingers like the gold coins of the legend," Wolpe writes, then traces the cover-up concerning the death of Uriah and terms Nathan's rebuke of David "a hinge of history." Remarkably the king does not kill the prophet who indicts him: "What Nathan punctures in parable is not only David's dormant conscience, but his self-deceptions and rationalizations." It is, for the king, all about deception, complexity, and contradiction.

David as father is a narrative "in which brothers are entangled in jealousy and repentance, hatred and near-fratricide." Wolpe nicely mentions that the Septuagint and a Qumran text (as is reflected in the NRSV) add a phrase concerning David's response to Absalom: "But he loved him." Wolpe adds, "If it was added later, the author might be looking to explicitly declare this baffling man capable of love." The ambiguity of David concerning Absalom—a rebel he must resist, the son he wants to save—shows that "David's divided heart is a leitmotif of his personality." This subtle, clever, manipulative man is nonetheless capable of being deceived:

A different attempt to explain David's blindness to brewing insurrection involves his susceptibility to deception. Remember that David was deceived by Nathan's parable. . . . He was deceived by the woman of Tekoa. . . . He was deceived by permitting Tamar to go to her brother and rapist Amnon, and by permitting Amnon to go to sheep shearing with Absalom. . . . Sometimes the deceiver is oblivious to the power of others to deceive.

At the end, David is a pitiful caretaker with "no more battles to win, rebellions to quell, women to woo." In his helplessness at the end his life he is like all who die: "When one is dying, he is neither king, nor doctor, nor priest, just a frail and fading man."

The book finishes with a reflection on how it is that David could be in the lineage of the Messiah who is to come. He fits in as an ancestor, Wolpe judges, "precisely because of his weaknesses, his transgressions, his artifices, his divided heart." David has that godlike quality "for good or for evil." "Perhaps David is the forerunner of the Messiah because this is the man who enacts what God wishes—in his sinfulness and sublimity, he is the most human of us all."

I have quoted this lovely book multiple times because its power is in its artistry, through which Wolpe lets us see how a storytelling imagination makes this remembered David a palpable contemporary for us. There is in this book a clear gain for

our understanding of David. But there are for me two other important take-aways. First, Wolpe is fully informed about critical issues in the text. He quietly acknowledges them but does not linger over them, instead moving on to generous postcritical interpretation. That surely is the way to read!

Second, the subtitle of the book, *The Divided Heart*, is crucial for this study. The author regularly notes the complexity and contradiction in David's life. This artistically rendered narrative of honesty is a formidable refusal of Enlightenment notions of the achievement of human well-being through technical means (drugs, cosmetics, electronic connections, and a host of other commodities), as if the human person were a problem to be solved. This narrative discernment of human dividedness is from powerfully Jewish texts; it is no wonder that Freud and the entire legacy of psychoanalysis is compellingly Jewish. We keep reading these texts because they attest our humanness, which society wants to deny but cannot in the end forego. This is a David in the image of God—and some God! Wolpe's *David* is an easy, fruitful read. But it must be done ever so slowly.



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Fail: Finding Hope and Grace in the Midst of Ministry Failure

By J. R. Briggs
InterVarsity Press, 208 pp.,
\$16.00 paperback



I've wanted to get my hands on J. R. Briggs's book since the moment I saw it advertised. We pastors are barraged with glossy brochures hustling pricey confabs that promise to increase our ministry, our budget, our reputation, our salary, our happiness, and our good looks. Just pay through the nose to attend the conference and copy the techniques of the handsome folks on the brochure. I'm exaggerating only a little.

The allure is strong because success is beautiful, in a way. More people and more giving means more impact for the kingdom, more influence for the gospel, more more more. But there has always been something odd about a faith with a man on a cross at its heart hustling for more. This book is no salve for mainline laziness criticizing evangelical creativity as one withers and the other grows. Its subjects are zealous, good-hearted pastors of all kinds who do things right and still meet our culture's most dreaded F-word.

Often in my time as a senior pastor I've found myself thinking, *So this is what failure feels like*. And I've not done anything that wrong. I was complaining about my years in Boone to a pastor from across the country who doesn't know me well. He asked the natural next question, "So how far down is your membership?" I said, well, we're actually up 15 percent. Why then do I feel like things are an inch from collapsing?

Briggs's *Fail* is about what he calls amoral failures, the ones not resulting from sleeping with the wrong person or stealing money or your life otherwise blowing up. Instead he writes about failure that stems from the leadership's betrayal, or folks not showing up or giving, or the church planting grant drying up. In Briggs's case, failure came at a megachurch in Philadelphia that hired him under false pretenses and then tried to forbid him from planting another church in the area. He was out on his own, without security or support or friendship nearby or the basic life accomplishments he expected, and he was wondering what went wrong. Precisely here is where the subtext of the expectation of success is so damning. Surely if we were doing things right, and God were good, our ministry would be succeeding, right?

The book's answer is a resounding no. Briggs sounds like a more conservative Christian than he is. (One failure he confesses is a lie he told: that he has an M.Div., when in fact he has a lesser degree.) His key sources here are Eugene Peterson, Henri Nouwen, and Dallas Willard. There's even a sighting of Barbara Brown Taylor. They help him argue that a pastor ought not be measured solely by the ABCs: attendance, buildings, and cash. We should add a D, for discipleship.

Still, things often go haywire. Briggs cites appalling statistics of pastors whose marriages fail (50 percent), who claim to have no close friends (70 percent), and who say they were inadequately trained for the job (90 percent—seminaries take notice!). And he tells moving stories of pastors learning to pray like the psalmist when everything has come unglued (one prayed in public, "What the f— do you want with me, God?!"); of a pastor who realizes that the way out of the yo-yoing between thinking she's a princess and believing that she's valueless is to think like an heir whose value comes from her adopted Father; of pastors who push through shame and discover belovedness. There is real spiritual wisdom here, of the sort every pastor must find or do something else.

Briggs draws on a friend's dissertation on pastors' amoral failures and whether the pastors bounce back. The friend found that the pastors' chances are much improved if they treat their church failures like a death. Grieving takes months. It comes in Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and eventual acceptance. Those who notice the grief would do best to act like the person is a bereaved spouse standing at the head of a casket. They should never say, "You're young, you'll find something better!"

Incredibly—or perhaps not so incredibly—one participant at an Epic Fail conference spoke of the closure of his church as being more painful than the loss of a child. Those who heal spend time in solitude, pray, read scripture, and (most interestingly to me) attend church again. In another denomination. In another zip code. But they return to God's house not as a leader but as a participant. Folks who heal also spend significant time with non-Christians, whom they find less judgmental and more accepting than God's own people. In short, they become human once more.

Sounds good, doesn't it?

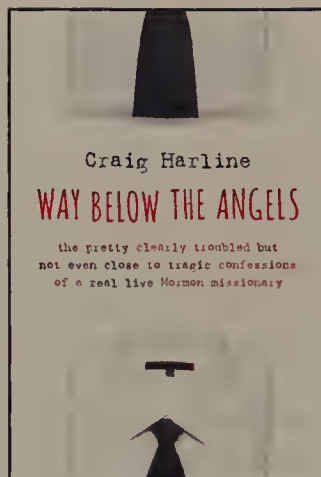
I think Briggs is on to something. The life of the Christian is a constant oscillation between cross and resurrection. For pastors, that back-and-forth is more fraught than for others. People cast their stuff on us, whether they hate us or worship us as heroes. We see the stories in the Bible and expect miracles, and when they don't come we settle. We end up drawing on whatever charisma we may have instead of on what we know to be true about Jesus.

Jesus doesn't want shopkeepers, as Peterson calls them: folks who sell wares and keep the customers happy. He wants witnesses to a peculiar God's counterintuitively saving work—especially in America, where we pursue the idol of success. Briggs is right to notice that the moniker *loser* is the most crushing epithet our clever culture has yet devised. But it's not what God wants. God wants faithfulness.

There is an irony in a book on failure becoming the next "it" book on the Christian publishing scene, just as there is to a conference called Epic Fail being marketed with QR codes. But it smells a lot more like Jesus than most of what's on offer out there.

Reviewed by Jason Byassee, senior pastor at Boone United Methodist Church in North Carolina.

**Way Below the Angels:
The Pretty Clearly Troubled
but Not Even Close to
Tragic Confessions of a
Real Live Mormon
Missionary**
By Craig Harline
Eerdmans, 281 pp., \$22.00



One cold afternoon in 1975 in a small rented bedroom in Antwerp, the young Mormon missionary Craig Harline (Elder Harline in Mormon parlance) had a faith crisis—though it is not quite right to call it that. He was frustrated with his mission, dismayed at his failure to convert even a single soul after months of work in Belgium. His hope and even his faith in God were waning. Maybe he was fooling himself; maybe God didn't care. Maybe there was no God.

To use the phrase “faith crisis” places young Elder Harline into a well-trodden narrative with guides familiar to most students of religion—Augustine, John of the Cross, even Malcolm X. There are the common wayposts—doubt, shattered confidence, surrender, catharsis. All of Christian history led to this moment: Elder Harline kneeling beside his hard bed, gazing toward heaven through his little window and the gray winter sky.

Yet Harline knew none of this, which is what makes this book so touching. He was no Augustine or Paul, no Billy Graham or Joseph Smith, not even, as he worried while in his initial weeks of training, a match for Elder Downing, the hero of his cadre of 19-year-old Mormons preparing to go out into the world and preach their gospel from the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and seven memorized lessons. He experienced the trials of faith as though he was the first and only, and the Harline of today—a historian of early modern Europe at Brigham Young University—is particularly gifted at capturing the universal humanity in what was an average experience as far as Mormon missions go.

As the title indicates, Harline's mission was neither particularly heroic nor particularly tragic, Harline himself neither a prodigy nor a failure. He was only a young man not well versed in scripture—like most Mormons (and most Christians), largely ignorant of Christian history and theology and possessed of no preternatural faith or spiritual gifts. As he says, “I'd never had the classic crisis of faith over whether God existed, or even the classic Mormon crisis over whether the church was the True Church or not, because there hadn't been any thought of such thoughts growing up.” Harline, this is to say, is a perfectly average Christian.

And that is gloriously enough. Many of the foibles Harline sees in his younger self will make many Mormons, ex-missionaries and not, nod in recognition, for mission culture is a highly potent distillation of Mormonism in total. Yet Harline is far less concerned with providing commentary on either Mormonism or its mission program than with capturing what

it is like to be one of those young men in a white shirt and a tie who depart the safety of Utah's Wasatch Front for such exotic locales as Belgium.

He struggled with perfectionism, “the highly popular missionary view that if you didn't obey 100 percent of the rules 100 percent of the time, then you couldn't be worthy of God reaching down and blessing you with converts.” He struggled with Roman Catholicism, convinced that all conversions derive from the influence of the Holy Ghost and therefore all rejections derive from the influence of Satan. Thus as Belgian after Belgian explained, “I am Catholic,” “I am Roman,” “I am Christian,” the young missionary began to shake his fist at every Catholic church he passed, cursing the priests for consorting with the Adversary. In jest. Sort of. He struggled with mission bureaucracy, hoping to climb the ladder from junior companion to senior companion to various arcane positions of accomplishment—district leader, zone leader, assistant to the president—through dutiful filling out of reports and wrestling with the printer in the mission president's office.

All of this—the officiousness, the naïveté, the compulsiveness about checklists and rule following—will be familiar to Mormons, and they certainly are traits easily stereotyped by critics of the faith. But Harline realizes that such foibles are simply and inevitably human, and his account is loving, more sheepish about than critical of his own blindness and blunders and those of the missionaries around him. He and his fellow missionaries were and are deeply sincere, in a truly humane sense.

The Antwerp mission—like any Mormon mission—could be hard on shallow faith. Idealistic 19-year-olds, certain that God would open the way for them, ran headlong into ceaseless rejection; children making fun of their white shirts and ties and chanting “CIA! CIA!”; ploddingly endless rows of doors, most of which would not be opened. Hours, every day. Repeatedly Harline came close to converting somebody who abruptly reversed course, and on one occasion he baptized a woman who, after a few follow-up visits, stopped answering the door. It was devastating. And yet he persisted.

That grinding effort brought to Harline a particularly Mormon form of grace. Moments of grace did not number nearly as many as the rejections, but sometimes, wondrously, a kind, elderly couple like Raymond and Yvonne Aerts would invite the young men into their home and amiably decline to learn about Mormonism while feeding and befriending them nonetheless. Or he would find himself in a snow-covered field near Zichem, late on Christmas Eve, having come with three other missionaries, a “little band of local magi,” to deliver a plate of sweets to a lonely woman once baptized Mormon who no longer came to church. As he looked out over the dark, untouched snow around her home, he “was smitten, overcome by not only the sort of calm I'd felt in the dismal upstairs bedroom but an unexpected joy

Reviewed by Matthew Bowman, who teaches at Hampden-Sydney College, Virginia, and is author of The Urban Pulpit: New York City and the Fate of Liberal Evangelicalism (Oxford University Press).

too—at seeing all this, at being in this place, in this land.” Protestants sometimes say that Mormons lack a language of grace, but the spiritual regeneration Harline experiences on his mission is rooted deep in Mormon lifeways, theology, and language.

“I want to tell them that we weren’t much different from any of them, even though we seemed like it,” Harline thinks, when he remembers all the Belgians he met. It sounds as though he is apologizing for his clumsy, youthful aggressiveness, and he is, but he is also thanking those Belgians who embraced him nonetheless. He is recalling the basic kindness that underlies the missionary impulse, whatever its execution, and he blesses Elder Downing, Elder Youngblood, Sister Acey, and all the rest for “their good hearts. Their missionary hearts. Their Belgian missionary hearts. Which are maybe just empathetic hearts.”

The rhetoric of family that dominates so much of Mormonism today derives from the essential vision of Joseph Smith: that salvation is a communal task, that sacraments are meant to bind together families and congregations and communities, and that heaven is heaven only because it is shared by those you love. Harline’s faith crisis and its resolution, his time in Belgium, and the great insight of this memoir are not merely an affirmation of the truth of Mormonism. They are a gradual, growing affirmation of one of those truths: that we all need simply to love and to be loved.

All My Puny Sorrows

By Miriam Toews
McSweeney’s, 330 pp., \$24.00

I was not sold on this book until page 148, when I read these lines:

My mother tells Tina that she doesn’t like books where the protagonist is established as sad on page one. Okay, she’s sad! We get it, we know what sad is, and then the whole book is basically a description of the million and one ways in which our protagonist is sad. Gimme a break! Get on with it!

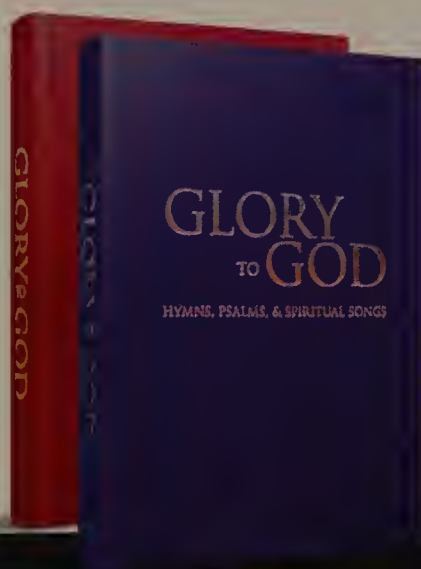
This is a book about deep, protracted, unrelenting sadness, and it knows it. Two sisters—Elf and Yoli—have each departed from the small conservative Mennonite town in Canada in which they grew up. Elf is an accomplished concert pianist who performs all over the world. Yoli is a writer of rodeo novels, in the midst of peripatetic relationships with men, and has broken all family rules by moving to Toronto. (“Nobody moves away

Reviewed by Amy Frykholm, CENTURY associate editor.



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from Winnipeg, especially to Toronto, and escapes condemnation. It's like the opposite of the Welcome Wagon. It is like leaving the Crips for the Bloods.") Both are grappling with their father's suicide and Elf's repeated suicide attempts.

Despite her many accomplishments, her devoted husband, her physical beauty, and her enviable career, Elf wants to die, and Yoli does not know how to stop her. Sadness is Elf's constant companion, and she wants relief that she cannot find in anything but death. At the beginning of the book, Yoli is in the hospital with Elf after a suicide attempt, and the book does not move far or fast from this center. Most of the story takes place in the hospital over a short period of time. Forays into the past, descriptions of the girls' childhoods, their unusual family, and their love for one another all lead back to the endless, leaden hours spent in the hospital with someone you love. This is a book about the mystery of sadness and the "million and one ways" that sadness takes up space in a life and overwhelms it.

Without giving away too much of the slender plot, the hero of the book is Yoli and Elf's mother, who does not like books about sadness. She learns, through the course of the novel, how to live without fear and works to teach others the same:

There was a note on the table. Yoli, she'd written, I've gone to a lecture on Eritrea. There's schaubel zup and schmooa kumpst in the fridge. I called her on her cell phone and

when she finally answered I heard raucous voices and whooping in the background. Where are you? I asked her. It's after eleven. She said hang on, hey guys, where am I?

Miriam Toews is the author of five other novels, the best known of which is *A Complicated Kindness*, the story of a teenager in a fundamentalist family. She has a wry, funny voice that is the readers' steady companion. She also has an eye for the absurd and a perfect tragicomic timing in delivery. Janice, the psych nurse, "loves to tango, because, she says, tango is about the embrace. She wears light pink track suits. She has a small furry animal chained to her belt loop. It's supposed to be something that makes the patients relax and smile."

The book is, at least in part, autobiographical. Like Yoli, Toews lost both a father and a sister to suicide, and this book could not have been written without that experience. She does not appear to be projecting or imagining someone else's pain, but grappling with her own and using fiction as a form of refining and sharing that experience. Is this a good idea? At the end of the book, I still could not tell. I did not feel the urge to rush out and recommend this reading experience to other people. And yet the book is funny and tender and self-aware, full of love for place and people, and it takes as its theme the central mystery of loving someone who does not want to live. It does not answer this mystery or so much as suggest how, like Yoli's mother, to live and to love in the midst of it.

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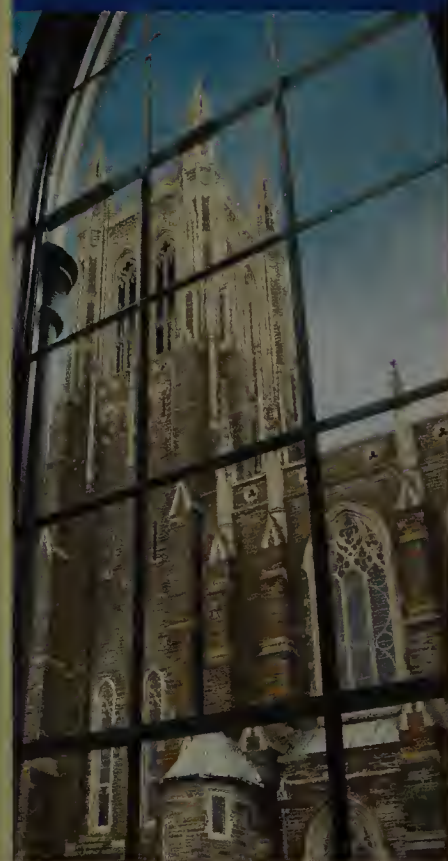
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Once in the West: Poems

By Christian Wiman
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux,
128 pp., \$23.00

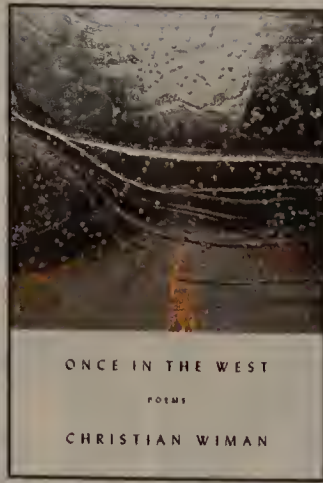
Christian Wiman, former editor of *Poetry* magazine and now lecturer in religion and literature at Yale Divinity School and the Yale Institute of Sacred Music, offers further evidence that his voice is among the most compelling in contemporary poetry. Like the writings in his prose collection *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer*, these poems are filled with theological conundrums, unanswered questions, brutal answers to questions never formed, and above all, contradictions. Wiman holds belief and unbelief in a precarious balance that finally tips toward "Love's reprieve."

The collection begins with a prayer that readers "blurred / by anxiety / or despair / might find / here / a trace / of peace." That peace, however, is hard won, and the reader is challenged on every page to untangle the web of binaries that characterize one man's life and faith struggles. As Wiman so eloquently describes in *My Bright Abyss*, his perilous fight with serious and ongoing health issues have made him particularly aware of time passing.

One finds no shred of sentimentality or nostalgia in the poems that describe his early life. He is instead blatantly honest as he remembers killing birds with a pellet gun. "I felt nothing, and I will not betray those days," he writes, "if days are capable of being betrayed, / by pretending a pang in my larval heart." He describes purposely driving a steamroller over a black snake. He claims "I mean to be mean" in describing the "drycleaned deacons" and the "anusless angels / divvying up the deviled eggs and jello salad" at his childhood church. He claims in this poem to "abandon / even the pretense of prayer," but he ends the poem with the beginning of prayer: "Dear God—."

He admits that some days are "veined with grace," and in a poem in which a preacher speaks to seminarians, he notes "that rapt famished look that leaps / from person to person, year to year, like a holy flu"—this in the midst of the admission that "it's a bitch existence some Sundays."

Wiman's observations about the church and those in it who profess Christ but "live more remote from love" have been familiar complaints since the time of Christ. But when a poet makes these charges, the primary emphasis seems to be on the insincerity and inadequacy of language, which is being used dishonestly. If a profession of belief rolls easily off the tongue and leans toward cliché, it is all patter and no substance. That is precisely why these poems are often difficult. Wiman strenuously resists the hackneyed religious platitude or even the convenient expression of doubt. Instead, he uses poetry to stretch language to contain what it cannot say. This is not easy for writer or reader.



In spite of the seriousness of the subject matter, however, these poems are filled with delightful language play, with coined words that are just about perfect, and lyrical flights that make the reader stop and pronounce them aloud. "Here it comes, brothers and sisters, the confession of sins, / hominy hominy, dipstick doxology, one more churchcurdled hymn / we don't so much sing as haunt."

As for the present, Wiman is living in the in-between, in the limbo of the uncertainties a serious illness presents to him—a state of being which is, in the familiar language of Advent, the "already not yet." There is pain, and it can seem "hellfired . . . by some country Satan / who'd seasoned meat / with shattered glass." But there is also Chicago's Shedd Aquarium, which he visits with his wife and his two small children, where he watches the girls watching the tiny fish and realizes that "Something in us touches / suffering / touching / us." The collection ends with the last line of this poem, as with his wife he watches a new world opening up for his children, a world "almost / too green / too blue / to stand / And I held your hand."

Wiman is groping in the darkness toward a Christ who cries his own agony; he writes with the hope that he will not surrender to the "wonder / nothing means / Not to end / with a little flourish of earth." Maybe, he suggests in the faintest whisper, which carries hints of the resurrection, the answer will be "not to end."

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Carol Howard Merritt writes *Church in the Making* for the *Christian Century*.

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by Samuel Wells

Why God is jealous

I USED TO run parish family retreat weekends. My favorite icebreaker was to set out a hundred photographs, each one of a person showing a strong emotion. I'd invite each participant to choose a photo and say, in a couple of sentences, why he or she had selected it.

I've never forgotten a burly man, age around 30, who picked out a photograph of a smiling child who was tightly embracing a tub of candy. The man explained that he'd been married a year or two and felt he'd received the most fabulous gift in the world. It was clear he wasn't a high achiever or high earner or high anything much. But you couldn't match his smile. His wife looked pretty happy too. There wasn't a hint of boasting: there was just effervescent joy. When you're a pastor who's spent countless hours with couples who've come to see each another as a threat and a curse, you don't forget such a smile.

Later in the weekend I spoke with a man from the retreat who remembered the incident. This man seemed extremely restless and staccato of speech. He needed to share, so I said to him, "Go on, let it all out." What came out was this: "I hate that man for having what I don't have. It feels so unfair—I'm attractive, I'm kind, I'm hard-working, I'm even a virgin, if that helps—so why can't I smile with that kind of joy?"

That was the day I learned the difference between *envy* and *jealousy*. In everyday speech the words are often used interchangeably. But they're not the same. The difference is subtle, but vital. Jealousy is the anxiety of losing what you rightly have. Envy is the yearning to acquire what you don't have, but somebody else has. The smiling man was jealous: he loved what he had and was not the least bit embarrassed about it. My visitor was envious—he wanted what the smiling man had. Badly.

We frequently read in scripture that our God is a jealous God. If envy and jealousy were the same thing, that would be an absurd statement. What—God looking at other gods and thinking they do better miracles or came up with a better idea than creation? Don't be silly. But if jealousy means being like the smiling man, then yes, God is like that. God treasures us with that unself-conscious smile of effervescent joy and does not mind who sees and who knows. God will hold on to us with that strong embrace and, if we go missing or astray, God will go to any lengths to come looking for us. A jealous God is part of the wonder of grace: God doesn't want a hundred other things—God wants us.

But we are envious. We just can't be glad for what we have. We compulsively look at what others have and feel impover-

ished by the comparison. In so doing we objectify their lives, seeing them as a series of commodities we could somehow acquire or that we feel entitled to. Meanwhile we diminish our own lives by seeing only their scarcity, never their plenitude.

Witness the parable of the late-hired laborers in Matthew 20:1–15. The early-hired laborers are envious. They don't see why they shouldn't get more—a lot more—than those hired late in the day. Our sympathies are with them; whether you see them as Jews and gentiles, lifelong believers and deathbed converts, or as exploited laborers in many parts of the world today, the issue seems one of pure justice: if you work hard and long you get rewarded; if you work just as hard and twice as long you get doubly rewarded.

But what if the agreed daily wage is forgiveness and eternal life? The only response is overflowing gratitude and indescribable joy. God's grace can't be halved or multiplied. It's ridiculous to demand "double eternal life" or "triple forgiveness." There's only one reason we'd ask for such a thing—even

A jealous God is part of the wonder of grace.

demand it—and that's because our envy has so consumed us that we can't enjoy what we have for fear that someone else might have something better.

It's no small thing to have forgotten the difference between envy and jealousy. The economy depends on us desiring what we don't have and acquiring something similar or better of our own. Perhaps it's time for the rehabilitation of jealousy. If our sense of God's grace is so precious, we should guard it jealously, nurture it, foster it, and seek ways to deepen and enrich it. The time spent comparing ourselves with others is time wasted.

In the end we shall come face to face with God and say, "I took you for an envious God, constantly looking around at others, and so I became an envious person, restlessly comparing, assuming others had it so good. All the time I was looking here, there and everywhere, thinking you were the same. But now, standing here before you, seeing your piercing and utterly loving gaze, I understand I was wrong. You're a jealous God: all the time you were just looking at me."

Samuel Wells is the vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London.

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ON Media

Best pictures

On the second anniversary of our media column, we asked several of our writers to reflect on their favorite theological films.

Beth Felker Jones: I've never seen a film that translates grace to the screen like *Babette's Feast* (directed by Gabriel Axel, 1987). As one of the rare films that focuses on the lined and battered faces of real people, *Babette's Feast* challenges viewers to love real life. The film embraces God's love for the embodied, the ordinary and the value of the extraordinary, and a love that wastes nothing. I cry when I see Babette pinching pennies so that the old people's soup will taste good, then pouring herself out for one delicious, improbable foretaste of the feast to come.

The Mission (Roland Joffé, 1986), like *Babette's Feast*, lovingly portrays

people who don't usually make it onto the silver screen. The film layers sin and holiness together. It shows the church at its worst: violent, predatory, greedy, and ethnocentric. And it shows the church at its best: a community that values every human life, that loves without counting cost, and from which beautiful voices are raised in praise. The film's music is another foretaste of heaven.

Little Miss Sunshine (Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, 2006) helps me to live in the broken, frustrating reality of the church. It's a touching portrayal of how a community—in this case, a family—may be truly odd and broken and yet come together in a way that challenges and laughs at the wrongness of the world.

Beth Felker Jones teaches theology at Wheaton College.



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HEAVEN AND EARTH: A surprise dinner is the heart of *Babette's Feast*.

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LET'S GO BOWLING: *The Coen brothers' tribute to slackerdom.*

Jason Byassee: The Coen brothers' sense of humor is not for everyone, but anyone with any sympathy for slackerdom can find a place in his heart for *The Big Lebowski* (Joel and Ethan Coen, 1998). I consider it a near-perfect illustration of the ancient Christian virtue of apatheia. The Dude (Jeff Bridges) wants only one thing: to get his rug replaced ("it really held the room together"). Otherwise he doesn't want a lot. Christians are not supposed to want a lot either. This is a Christian parable about *mutatis mutandis*, transformation through the small things.

The Way (Emilio Estevez, 2010) is a glorious depiction of the 800-kilometer, thousand-year-old trail from the Pyrenees to Santiago de Compostela. It's also a tender depiction of a difficult relationship between a father and his son. Tom Avery (Martin Sheen) is a father lamenting a son who died on the trail. Estevez, Sheen's real-life son, directs the film and appears at key moments. The concluding scene of worship at the cathedral is as perfect a depiction of liturgy as I've seen on film.

Sin has to be depicted as genuinely enticing for sainthood to be shown as far more intoxicating. Despite the marvels of cinematic special effects, it's nearly impossible to make a miracle believable. *The End of the Affair* (Neil Jordan, 1999) does it—by not showing it. It also suc-

ceeds in making God real enough to be worth rejecting.

Of Gods and Men (Xavier Beauvois, 2010) examines a small community of Trappist monks in colonial-era Algeria who are squeezed between resurgent violent fundamentalist Muslims and the village of neighbors they have come to love. This film includes some of the best depictions of leadership I have ever seen. The abbot helps a frightened community prepare to face martyrdom—confident, if not unafraid.

Jason Byassee is senior pastor of Boone United Methodist Church in Boone, North Carolina.

Amy Frykholm: *Lars and the Real Girl* (Craig Gillespie, 2007) shows the power of the visual medium to tell a theological story. I not only felt that I knew Lars (Ryan Gosling), but that I knew myself through his fear of the tangles of relationship, his anxiety about the need to be transformed, and his desire to put transformation off as long as possible. I experienced how God can call out to us even when we are doing everything we can do to turn away.

To others, *Lars and the Real Girl* might be a "black comedy," as it is categorized on the website IMDb; I found it to be both a theological as well as a personal commentary: my favorite kind of film.

Amy Frykholm is a *CENTURY* associate editor.

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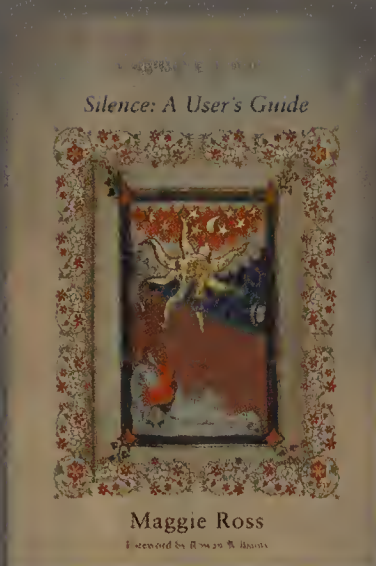
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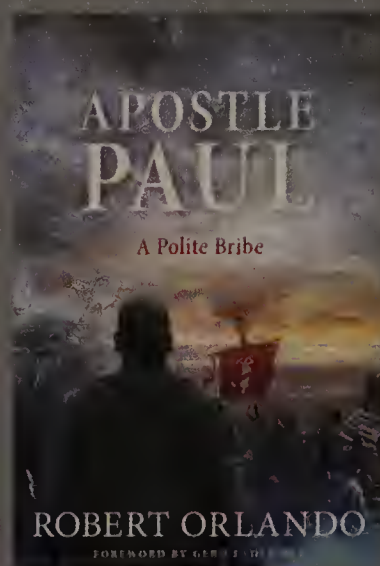
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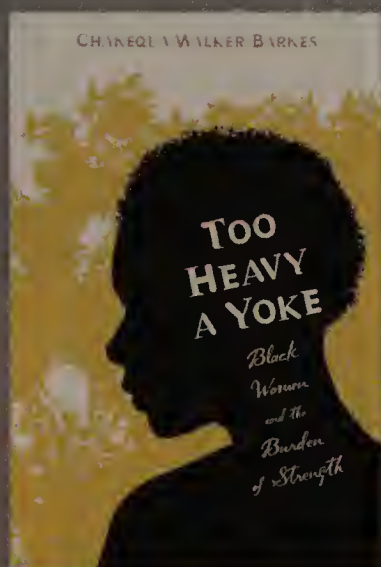
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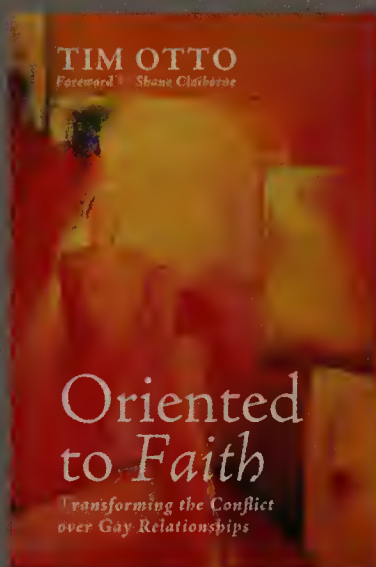
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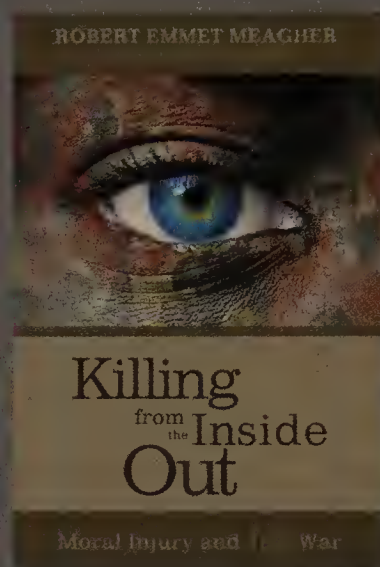
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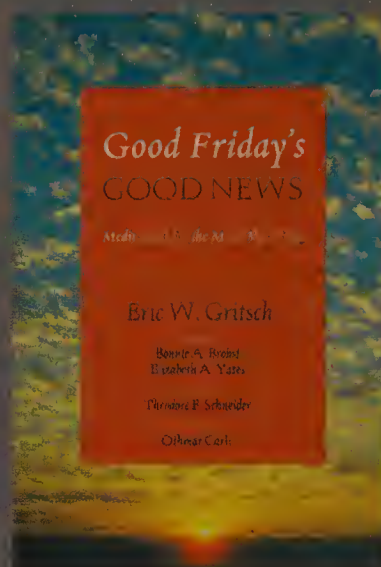
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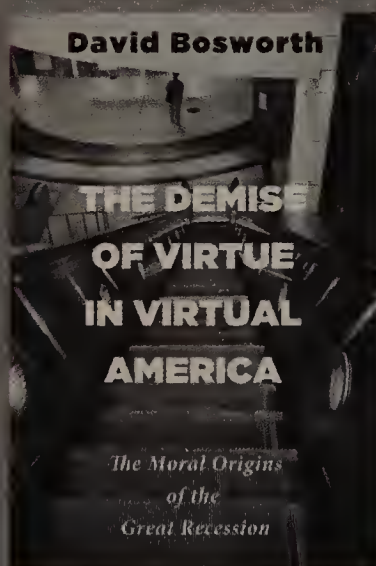
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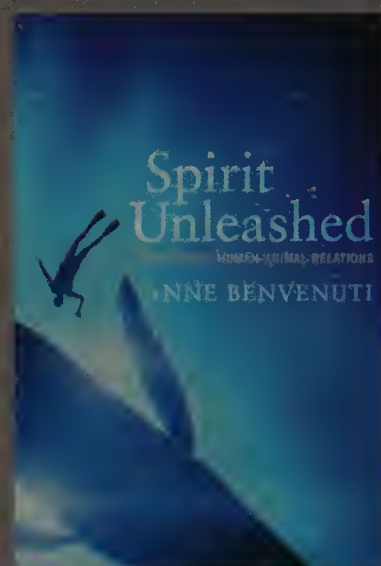
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by Carol Howard Merritt

CHURCH in the MAKING

Putting away the silver

In her essay “An Expedition to the Pole,” Annie Dillard writes about explorers who didn’t make it. When their skeletons were exhumed, researchers learned a lot about their last days. For instance, many of them tucked settings of silver into their coats. When those adventurers braved the frigid brutalities of the Antarctic, they could not imagine leaving behind those elegant and weighty trappings of luxury. They clutched their family crest etched into the polished metal even when they didn’t have the sustenance to survive. This image reminded Dillard of the church.

It’s a metaphor that Robert Leopold also uses as he describes his adventure starting Southside Abbey, a church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. “We can get so worried about the silver,” Leopold said as we met over lunch. The Eucharist is central to Leopold’s ministry, but “in our churches, we’ve stylized the meal so much that we can’t even recognize it any longer,” Leopold said. “What is that wafer and tiny cup? How is that a meal?”

If I’m portraying Leopold as a cynic, he’s not. He loves traditional worship, pipe organs, and silver settings. He radiates with passion for the history of the Episcopal Church he serves. Yet two years ago he realized that he wasn’t called to be the pastor of an established church any longer. He was ready to put the silver in the closet in order to reach out to the “unchurched, anti-churched, and over-churched.” Leopold asked his bishop if he could start a

new congregation, and Southside Abbey began with a grant from the diocese.

I visited the congregation, which met in the Hart Gallery, a nonprofit organization that provides support to artists who are experiencing homelessness, low income, crisis, or mental or physical challenges. A bright garden mural extends along the side of the building, contributing to the hipster vibe of this Chattanooga neighborhood. A curbside book nook stands in front of the gallery, allowing children to borrow colorful volumes and return them to the window-sized box.

I had to dodge a fierce rain in order to enter the art gallery by 6:11 on a Friday night. As my clothes began to dry, I noticed the warm walls vibrating with artists’ color, and the air breathed with creativity. The energy echoed through the space, dispelling any gloom that the rain brought outside. Most people were sitting at a long table in the center of the gallery, like a giant family at Thanksgiving dinner.

A woman stretched out her hand with a warm welcome, asking my name and how I had heard about the church. She became my guide on our expedition, filling me in on the details and letting me know what to expect. She told me that the service took place at 6:11 because of the words in Matthew 6:11, “Give

us this day our daily bread.” As she pointed out the art, the place filled up with the young and old, homeless and well-heeled, a diversity of ethnicities, and people with varying intellectual abilities.

Someone hastily passed out sheets of worn green card stock printed with an Episcopal service liturgy. Southside Abbey intentionally uses prayers and songs that are in the public domain. When Leopold arrived, he picked up a stole and placed it over his T-shirt and cargo shorts, and then explained the service.

“This is how it works,” he said, pointing to the sheet of paper. “Different individuals are going to speak in the places where it says ‘One.’ Everyone says the parts marked ‘All.’ After we receive the bread, we’re gonna go to the kitchen.” He looked toward the back of the gallery, allowing his chin to point the way. “We have cheese pizza tonight.” And with that, we began with the familiar words of a collect.

The evening had the feel of a dinner with friends. The intimate space and group of people made me imagine what that first (and last) supper must have been like.

Over pizza, Sarah Weedon, a student from Sewanee School of Theology, read the scripture and invited us to break up into small groups to

reflect on the passage. After eating the pizza we passed the cup, singing a simple melody as we did.

Since the overhead has been kept low, the Abbey is able to put more resources into mission. When the community found out that a church in the city was raising \$700,000 to erect enormous aluminum crosses on the side of the highway, it decided to try to raise a comparable amount of money for outreach in the community. It began a Jubilee Fund that has gone to support a tutoring program, provide computers for a local elementary, and start a language school.

The ministry and mission of Southside Abbey is not meant to be a secret. The Abbey is committed to making the community replicable, even as they know every context will give birth to a unique expression. To that end, they made their founding documents, bylaws, and budget available on their website.

As I thought about the other expedition that this community is on, I thought of the skeletons of those polar adventurers. But Leopold quickly brought me back to the truth of our faith. “I want people to know that they can do this too. They can do that dream,” he said. “I mean, if we’re resurrection people, what are we afraid of?”

Carol Howard Merritt’s column Church in the Making appears in every other issue.

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Community Church at Tellico Village is seeking a **SENIOR PASTOR** to lead our pastoral team and congregation following the retirement of our pastor who served for 17 years. CCTV is a 1,400-member interdenominational church located SW of Knoxville, TN, in a planned community on Tellico Lake in the foothills of the Smoky Mountains. The church is affiliated with the International Council of Community Churches. The ideal candidate possesses a deep personal faith in Jesus Christ and demonstrates a true desire to shape his or her ministry by the Great Commandment. S/he values Christian unity and ecumenical cooperation. S/he is a mature "people person" with leadership skills who has a passion for preaching, developing fellowship, and spiritual growth ministries. Ministers from all denominations may apply. M.Div. required. If interested, visit us at www.tellicochurch.com and post résumé to search@tellicochurch.org. Otherwise mail to TVCC Search Team, 130 Chota Center, Loudon, TN 37774. The deadline for submission of application materials is November 15, 2014.

Community Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) located in the Country Club Plaza area of urban Kansas City, MO, invites candidates for the position of **SENIOR PASTOR**. Community Christian draws membership/attendance throughout the metro area encompassing communities in both Missouri and Kansas. We seek applicants who display effective preaching skills and visionary leadership for a diverse congregation interested in worshipping joyfully, celebrating the arts, and doing justice. All applicants must have a Masters of Divinity degree and be ordained by a recognized Protestant faith (Disciples or UCC preferred). We are committed to fair market value compensation and project the successful candidate will begin his/her duties on or about September 1, 2015. Please submit your résumé to TCranshaw@kc.rr.com by October 31, 2014.

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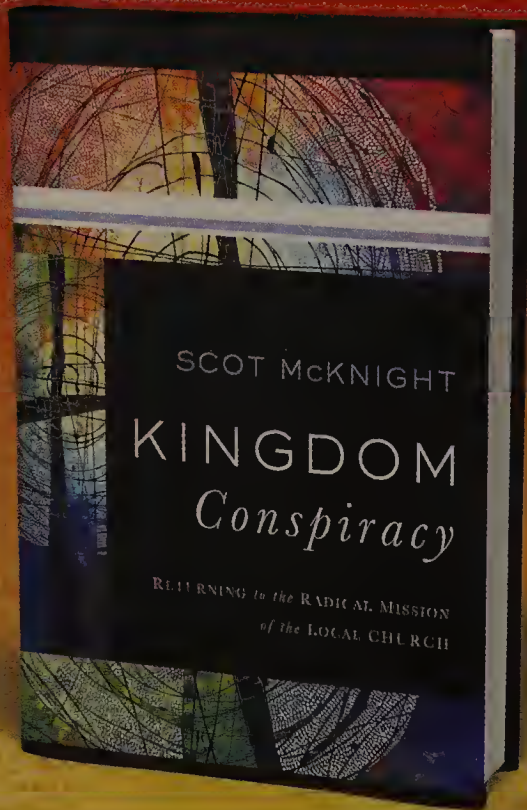
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Sermon on the Mount, by Fra Angelico (1387–1455)

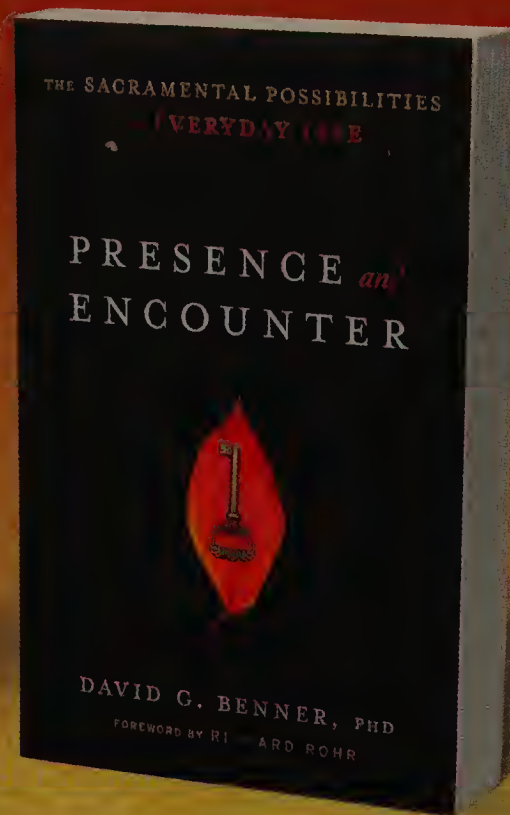
While in residence at San Marco's, a Dominican monastery in Florence, Fra Angelico and his assistants were commissioned to decorate the meeting rooms and cells of the lay brothers, novices, and clergy. Many of the more than 40 frescoes depicted scenes of the crucifixion. One room that is slightly larger than the monks' cells and in close proximity to the magnificent library (commissioned and funded by Cosimo de' Medici) contains this fresco of the Sermon on the Mount. The room presumably functioned as a classroom. In Matthew 5, Jesus is presented as the "new Moses" whose teaching was intended not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.

Art selection and commentary by Heidi J. Hornik, who teaches in the art department at Baylor University, and Mikeal C. Parsons, who teaches in the school's religion department.

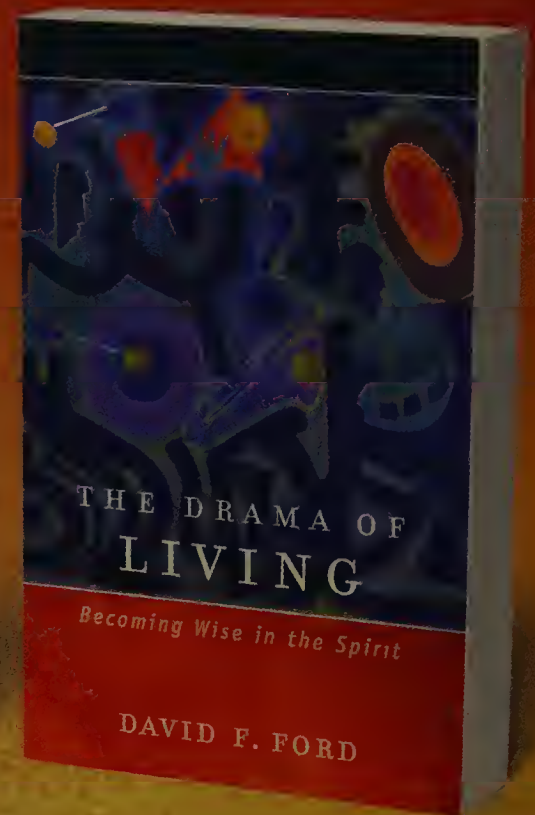
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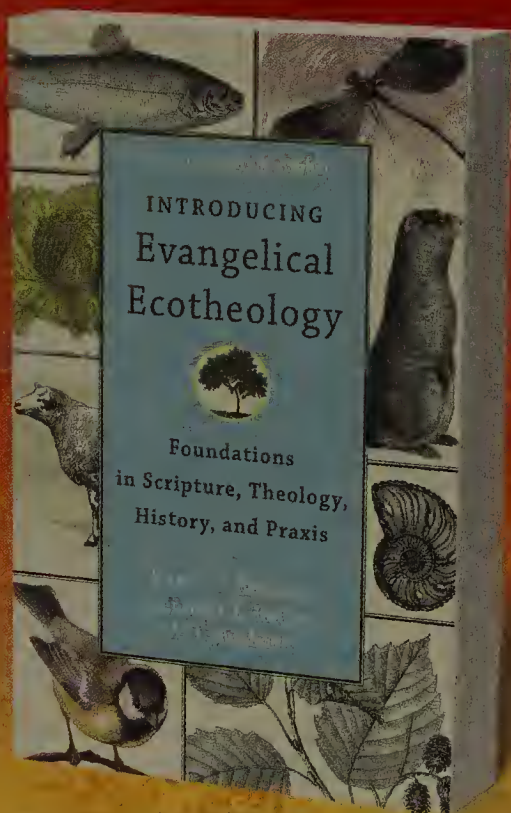
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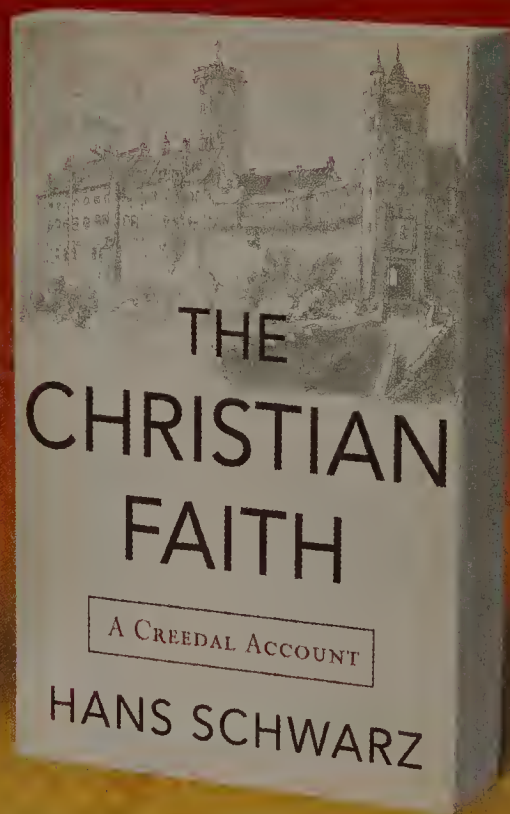
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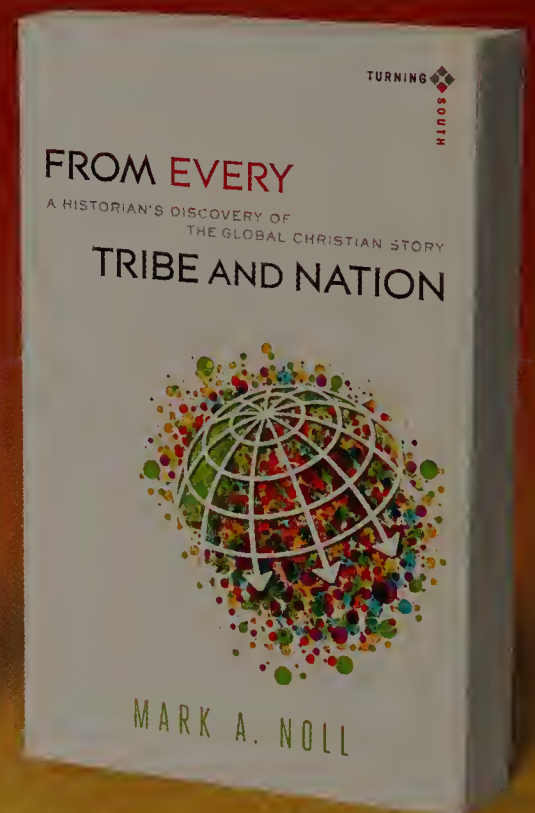
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